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LONESOME ROAD

Look down, look down dat lonesome road
Whah me and my pardner's got to go. . . .

—NEGRO SONG

LONESOME ROAD

Six Plays for the Negro Theatre

BY PAUL GREEN



With an Introduction by
BARRETT H. CLARK

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ROBERT M. McBRIDE & COMPANY
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For permission to reprint a revised version of *White Dresses*, thanks are due Charles Scribner's Sons; likewise the Poet Lore Company for *The Hot Iron* and *The End of the Row*.

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TO

Abraham McCranie

DREAMER AND MARTYR

INTRODUCTION

AN instructor in philosophy at one of our Southern universities, a young man who has spent all but three years of his life near his birthplace in North Carolina, has written nine or ten folk plays as stirringly beautiful as any that have ever been written by an American. Most of them are concerned with the Negroes in that "vast and fertile coastal plain which stretches inland from the sea," who in the "so-called humanizing of this wide expanse" have borne the "brunt of the brutal dirty work."

Paul Green, at the age of thirty-two, has already evolved a type of lyrical folk drama unlike anything that has so far been written in this country. Such plays as *The End of the Row* and *In Abraham's Bosom* are as firmly rooted in the soil of the South as *Deep River* or *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.* The more I read of his most significant work, the more firmly am I convinced that Mr. Green is doing for our drama what the writers of the spirituals have done for Negro music. I think our theater has found here an artist of rare gifts. I must qualify this statement, not because I hesitate to speak out what I feel or because I want to wait for Mr. Green's later plays to justify my first enthusiasm; I am just a little

skeptical as to whether our theater, as it is now organized and run, is ready to give Mr. Green's plays the chance they ought to have. The first producer who brings them to the attention of the general theater-going public will be duly honored for his "far-sightedness," though up to the present a number of them have declined the honor, at the same time expressing a wish to see other manuscripts—somewhat nearer to the type the public is supposed to want.

It was to be expected that such poignant and heart-breaking tragedies as the full-length version of *In Abraham's Bosom* should frighten the average producer; and after all, it does take time for any original dramatist to reach Broadway. But this is a detail, and sooner or later Mr. Green's plays will be produced professionally, reaching the public that wants to see them. Meantime his other plays are being done here and there throughout the country by amateurs and advanced Little Theater companies.

His first plays were produced at Chapel Hill, N. C., by Professor Koch's Carolina Playmakers, and many of them are still in their repertory.

The first of his Negro plays to receive adequate production was *The No 'Count Boy*, which Oliver Hinsdell, director of the Dallas Little Theater, brought to New York in the spring of 1925, and with which he won the Belasco Cup in the National Little Theater Tournament.

Several plays have been published: two in *Carolina Folk Plays*, six in the volume *The Lord's Will*, and now six more in *Lonesome Road*. Three or four others appear either separately or in anthologies.

Mr. Green's biography is very short. Being still young and much more interested in the work he is doing and planning to do than he is in the details of his uneventful life, he sent me just a few sentences, which I reprint verbatim:

> Born on a farm near Lillington, N. C., March 17, 1894. Farmed in the spring and summer and went to country school a few months in the winter. Later went to Buie's Creek Academy, from which he was graduated in 1914. Taught country school two years. Entered the University of North Carolina in 1916. Enlisted in the army in 1917. Served as private, corporal, sergeant and sergeant-major with the 105th Engineers, 30th Division. Later as Second Lieutenant at Paris. Served four months on the Western front. Returned to the University of North Carolina in 1919. Was graduated from there in 1921. Did graduate work at his alma mater and at Cornell University At present is a member of the faculty at the University of North Carolina.

He may have routed a dozen enemy machine-gun nests for all I know: he would never say a word about it.

After his return from France he began work with

"Prof" Koch, as he is familiarly known at Chapel Hill. Through his association with the founder of the Playmakers—who has a knack for getting his students to write about the people and places they know best, and is far too wise to "teach" the art of play construction—he received encouragement and an opportunity for seeing his early efforts staged and acted by his fellow-students. Like most of the "Prof's" students, Mr. Green did not bother his head much over the technique or esthetics of drama; he just wrote, pouring out what he had to say as best he could. Often he had to turn out plays to order for the Playmakers, but his heart was in the Negro dramas which for some reason the Playmakers have not yet attempted to act.

His first play was written in 1917. It was a juvenile affair contrived for a senior class production at Chapel Hill. That, as well as a poetic drama and a tragedy written in 1919, was destroyed.

In 1918 he wrote *The Last of the Lowries*, one of the most popular of the Carolina folk plays. It was inevitable that his early work should be imitative. The plot is similar to that of *Riders to the Sea*, but in all justice to the American, it should be stated that his play is based upon actual events. Besides, his theme is more humanly dramatic than Synge's, since the tragedy is effected through the agency of man, while Synge's is simply the exposi-

tion of man's helplessness face to face with the forces of nature.

Two other "white" plays followed in the same year, *Old Wash Lucas* and *The Old Man of Edenton*, the one a character sketch and the other a melodrama.

Then, in the same year of 1920, he wrote *White Dresses*. This is a little incident about a Negro girl who is in love with a white man. The man's father forces the girl to marry a "black nigger" she detests, in order to keep his son and the girl apart. The girl's grandmother hints that this son and she (the girl) are children of the same father. A tragedy in miniature lies in the old mammy's words that close the play: "I knows yo' feelings, chile, but you's gut to smother 'em in, you's gut to smother 'em in."

For the first time, so far as I am aware, a dramatist has taken a Negro theme almost as old as our literature, and made it live in dramatic form. Mr. Green knows his Negroes, and like John Synge, that other artist who created literature as well as drama out of the folk idiom, he has made use of the commonest words and phrases, giving them new and surprising turns, and making of them a living speech.

The next Negro play was not written until several one-acters of varying merit about whites had been turned out, some of them, like *The Lord's Will*,

with good stuff in them, and others, like *Round and Round*, which he regarded merely as experimental exercises.

The second of his characteristic Negro plays is *The Prayer Meeting*. It seems strange that this is the first successful attempt to introduce into our theater the full-blooded Negro, the healthy animal, neither a downright villain nor a dreamy Uncle Tom's Cabin sort of sentimentalist. Mr. Green has learned from observation and experience that the Negro, living under the white man's civilization, has not had a pleasant time of it. The white man has given him religion, under the influence of which he often becomes a savage again; he has given him liquor, business methods, the vote, ambition, education; yet the Negro, only half assimilating what is theoretically his rightful heritage, finds himself up against the white man's prohibitions and prejudices.

But *The Prayer Meeting* is primarily a work of art, a human and not a sociological document. Mr. Green may care a good deal about the plight of the Negro, but his concern is primarily with human beings as individuals. This play is a marvelous exhibition of the vast fund of devilry in the soul of the Negro; it is a revelation of unsounded depths in the soul of the black man. With the instinct of a true dramatist, Mr. Green has taken a situation which is ready to hand. The Negro prayer meeting is a drama in itself, and I cannot understand

why it has not been used before in a play. In this ready-made plot, the dramatist has simply set in motion a group of well-realized characters. He really needs no story at all, in the usual sense of the term, and no theatrical trickery.

The Prayer Meeting is a study in Negro psychology, with none of the disturbing elements introduced by white civilization. *Sam Tucker* skillfully introduces the tragic theme of the Negro in relation to the white man. The same theme is more tragically developed in the one-act version of *In Abraham's Bosom.* The Negro's effort to better himself by means of education is the basis of this tragic episode. It would be so easy to sentimentalize over Abraham's plight, to regard the play as a document; but there is nothing in it besides the human struggle. In treating the problems of the American Negro Mr. Green knows instinctively that the greatest problems are those that the human being must face as an individual.

What he scarcely more than touched upon in the one-act play, he has recently developed in an epic tragedy. The full-length work, also known as *In Abraham's Bosom,* not yet produced or published, is one of the most beautiful and tragic modern plays I have ever read. The character of Abraham is developed through six scenes, each depicting a crisis in the hero's heartbreaking struggle to develop his limited mental powers. With the aid of a white man

he is at first enabled to do some studying, and even succeeds in opening a small school for Negroes. But every time he seems on the point of success, he finds himself thwarted. Now, his tragedy is not altogether that of the Negro in a white man's world; as a matter of fact, his failure lies ultimately within himself, attributable to his racial and individual shortcomings.

In this play there is no effort to solve the problem: it is Mr. Green's business simply to state it in terms of humanity. Abraham remains a pitiful figure, held down by the limitations imposed upon him by nature and by man. Far from offering any solution in this and his other work, Mr. Green is over-modest. "Doubtless," he says in the preface to this book, "readers of these plays will object that they are not generally representative of the Negro race. They are not meant to be. Specifically, the chief concern here is with the more tragic and uneasy side of Negro life as it has exhibited itself to my notice through a number of years on or near a single farm" in the coastal plain of North Carolina. Not long after writing this, he added in a personal letter that he "grew up on a farm and for twenty-three years saw nothing else."

But what Mr. Green has seen and experienced, he knows and can interpret. He may have known no more than a few acres of the county in which he was born, but from that limited area he has been

able to draw the inspiration that animates his plays, and to strike in them a universal chord. If he should never again leave his native state, he would still have enough material to keep him busy for a long lifetime. One's knowledge of humanity, of course, is not a matter of travel, but of intuition.

Of the remaining Negro plays in *Lonesome Road* one—*Your Fiery Furnace*—is another arrangement of a scene from the full-length drama *In Abraham's Bosom*. The other two, *The Hot Iron* and *The End of the Row*, stand at the apex of Mr. Green's achievement. In *The End of the Row* we have Abraham's problem again, of the Negro who wants to better his condition, only in this case it is further complicated by the problem of sex. Here a young and attractive woman strives, with the help of a white man, to improve herself, but the man is anxious also to possess the girl, though he is also interested in her education. The incident round which the girl's tragedy is built takes place during the rest hour in the hot cotton fields. There is no violence in this quiet scene, only the helpless and baffling struggle of a human being. Lalie is forced in the end to give in to the proposals of the white man, and though she loves him, she has made a heroic sacrifice.

The Hot Iron is one of the most affecting one-act plays I know. With the simplest imaginable dramatic elements and scarcely an episode by way of plot, the dramatist has animated his characters with

the breath of life. By the intensity of his art Mr. Green has endowed the man and the woman with the sufferings and longings of mankind. I forget in reading it that the characters are Negroes from a part of the world I know little about, but it makes no difference: I am made to understand the people.

Mr. Green stands alone among our younger playwrights as a man who can touch with equal skill the lighter and more sentimental side of life, and the tragedy of it. There are two plays, not in *Lonesome Road* or *The Lord's Will*, quite as good in their way, though not so somber in mood, as the best in *Lonesome Road*. *The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock* is a delicious bit of grotesque horseplay, genuine, imaginative, poetic. A young couple frighten an old man into giving them the money that rightfully belongs to them, in order that they may get married and set up housekeeping. Mr. Green has created a memorable figure in Uncle January, a superstitious old fellow who thinks he has died and come to life again.

In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin is described as a Negro melodrama. Two Negroes have killed a white man, and seek refuge in a deserted cabin once occupied by the witch woman Aunt Mahaly. The scene is reminiscent of *The Emperor Jones*, but it is elaborated by the introduction of a world of demonology in the shape of ghostly apparitions. One of the

murderers kills the other, but not until he is himself mortally wounded in the fight. In his dying moments there passes before his over-wrought brain a panorama of all the mysterious practices of Aunt Mahaly. *In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin* is not so much a study of panic fear as a grotesque fantasy on Negro themes. There is far less conscious art in it than there is in O'Neill's play and more of the folk element. It is an elaborate pageant of dramatized folklore.

The last of the Negro plays is probably the best-known of all Mr. Green's work, *The No 'Count Boy*. Different from anything else he has done, this idyl is a most appealing and delightful poetic play. To say that it is somewhat reminiscent of Synge means little, for the characters and the language are altogether Mr. Green's own. This is the story of a dreamy boy who nearly succeeds in carrying off the fiancée of a practical-minded young Negro, simply by playing the mouth-organ and telling her of his (wholly imaginary) travels in distant cities. There is a wealth of poetry in the little scene, and rich characterization.

Mr. Green's latest plays, *Quare Medicine* and *The Field God*, show the dramatist's effort to widen his horizon and vary his style. But since both these plays, the first in one and the other in three acts, are in course of revision, it is not necessary to do

more than state that they are well-written, solidly constructed plays dealing with the whites of Eastern North Carolina.

So far Mr. Green has shown an extraordinary adaptability in form and style; he can write tragedy and comedy, drab realism and highly imaginative fantasy. Like all young writers, he has his literary preferences, authors who have influenced him, for better or for worse. Hardy and Synge and O'Neill seem to predominate, but since Mr. Green knows this, there is perhaps less danger of conscious imitation than there would be in a less original artist.

I feel that his greatest gifts are his instinctive talent for seizing upon a dramatic situation, his poetic imagination, and his intuitive knowledge of character. I believe that poetic imagination is what our theater stands most in need of. We have skilled technicians a-plenty, and in O'Neill a great artist of many aspects. But as yet we have no genuine folk dramatist besides Paul Green. If he were at this moment to cease writing he would be entitled to a place of honor in the development of the American drama. But he is only beginning. Was any beginner ever better equipped?

BARRETT H. CLARK.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

TO *the reader unacquainted with the physiography of North Carolina it may be well to mention that approximately two-fifths of the state is embraced in a vast and fertile coastal plain which stretches inland from the sea to a maximum distance of one hundred and twenty-five miles. In the so-called humanizing of this wide expanse the Negro—if we view the matter somewhat in panorama—has borne the brunt of the brutal dirty work. For more than a hundred years he has built roads there, leveled hills and forests, plowed the fields, sweated and groaned forth the great brag crops of naval stores, of cotton, tobacco, and corn with little or no reward, material or otherwise. Living in the vilest of huts, the prey of his own superstition, suspicions and practices, beaten and forlorn before God Almighty himself—he has struggled helplessly in the clutch of affliction and pain. He has perished by the thousands in the long servitude of his white master. Unceasingly he has matched his strength with the earth that bore him, going forever in the end to rot unnoticed in the land he'd tilled. Through a few winter rains perhaps a falling head-board strove futilely to tell that he had been, and then the plow passed over him and*

a hill of corn or cotton flourished from his breast. Such is his story before imagined justice.

In the following pages a first effort is made to say something of what these people more recently have suffered and thought and done. For it seems apparent now that such things are worthy of record. Doubtless, readers of these plays will object that they are not generally representative of the Negro race. They are not meant to be. Specifically, the chief concern here is with the more tragic and uneasy side of Negro life as it has exhibited itself to my notice through a number of years on or near a single farm in that coastal land. Those in search of happier and more cheerful records may find them elsewhere.

The dialect used—with the exception of that in the first play—is still current among the colored farmer-folk in that section of the world. As an aid to reading, the final d's *and* g's *have been retained.*

P. G.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	VII
AUTHOR'S NOTE	XIX
IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM	1
WHITE DRESSES	39
THE HOT IRON	69
THE PRAYER-MEETING	89
THE END OF THE ROW	133
YOUR FIERY FURNACE	171
LIST OF PAUL GREEN'S PLAYS	219

IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

"De blind man stood on de road and cried . . ."
—Negro song.

CHARACTERS

ABRAHAM MCCRANIE—*a Negro.*
GOLDIE MCALLISTER—*his sweetheart.*
COLONEL MCCRANIE—*a white man.*
LONNIE MCCRANIE—*his son.*
BUD GASKINS, LIJE HUNNEYCUTT, PUNY AVERY—*Negro turpentine hands for the colonel.*

TIME—*Noon on a summer day late in the Nineteenth Century.*
PLACE—*A turpentine woods in eastern North Carolina.*

IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

THE *spring at the foot of a slope is in a cleared space, save for a spongy growth of grass and sickly ground creepers. To the rear a wide-spreading tangle of reeds, briars and alder bushes shuts around in a semi-circle. At the right front the great body of a pine, gashed and barked by the turpentine farmer's ax, lifts straight from the earth, and to the left a log lies rotting in the embrace of wild ivy. Maples, bays, dogwoods and other small trees overrun by tenacious vines raise their leafy tops to shade the spot. Through interstices in the undergrowth one can see the pine forest stretching away until the eye is lost in a colonnade of trees. The newly scraped blazes on the pines show through the brush like the downward spreading beards of old men, the ancient gnomes of the woods, mysterious, impersonal and forever watchful.*

At the left front four tin dinner pails hang on a limby bush. The sound of axes against the trees, accompanied by the rhythmically guttural "han—n—h! han—n—n—h!" of the cutters comes from the distance, and one of the unseen laborers breaks into a high mournful song—

My feet wuh wet—wid de sunrise dew,
De mornin' star—wuh a witness too.

'Way, 'way up in de Rock of Ages,
In God's bosom gwine be my pillah.

Presently there is a loud halloo near at hand, and another voice yodles and cries, Dinner time—mm—e! Git yo' peas, ev'ybody! *Voices are heard nearer, a loud burst of laughter, and then three full-blooded Negroes shuffle in, carrying long, thin-bladed axes, which they lean against the pine at the right. They are dressed in nondescript clothes, ragged and covered with the glaze of raw turpentine. As they move up to the spring they take off their ragged hats, fan themselves, and wipe the streaming sweat from their brows. Two of them are well-built and burly, one stout and past middle age with some pretension to a thin scraggly mustache, the second tall and muscled, and the third wiry, nervous and bandy-legged. They punctuate their conversation with great breaths of cool air.*

YOUNG NEGRO—Monkey walking in dis woods.

OLDER NEGRO—Yah, Jaboh progueing round and 'bout um.

LITTLE NEGRO—While us rest he roos' high in pine tree.

YOUNG NEGRO—Fall on Puny's back 'bout th'ee o'clock, git um down. Hee—hee.

PUNY—Ain't no monkey kin ride me, tell you.

They stand fanning themselves.

OLDER NEGRO—Dat nigger tough, ain't you, Puny?

PUNY—Tough as whit-leather, tough 'y God! [*He gets down on his belly at the spring.*] Mouf 'bout to crack, kin drink dis heah spring dry.

OLDER NEGRO—[*Slouching his heavy body towards the pool.*] Hunh, me too. Dem axes take water same lak a saw-mill.

He gets down flat and drinks with the other. The water can be heard gluking over the cataract of their Adam's apples. The YOUNGER NEGRO *opens his torn and sleeveless undershirt and stands raking the sweat from his powerful chest with curved hands.*

YOUNG NEGRO—[*After a moment.*] Heigh, Puny, you'n Lije pull yo' guts out'n dat mudhole and let de engineer take a drink.

With a sudden thought of devilment he steps quickly forward and cracks their heads together. PUNY *starts and falls face foremost in the spring.* LIJE, *slow and stolid, saves himself, crawls slowly up on his haunches and sits smiling good-naturedly, smacking his lips and sucking water from the slender tails of his mustache.*

LIJE—[*Cleaning his muddy hands with a bunch of leaves.*] Nunh-unh, not dis time, my boy.

YOUNG NEGRO—Haw, haw, look dere at po' Puny.

PUNY—[*Scrambling to his feet, strangling and sputtering.*] Damn yo' soul, why you push me, Bud Gaskins?

BUD—[*A threatening note slipping into his laugh.*] Hyuh, hyuh, don't you cuss at me, bo.

PUNY—Whyn't you 'pose on somebody yo' size? Better try Lije dere.

BUD *gets down and begins drinking.*

LIJE—[*Drawling.*] Don't keer 'f 'e do. Ducking good foh you dis hot weather.

PUNY—[*Helplessly.*] Allus picking at me. Wisht, wisht—

BUD—Heah I is lying down. Come on, do whut you wisht. [PUNY *makes no reply but turns off, wiping his face on his shirt sleeve, and staring morosely at the ground.* BUD *gets to his feet.*] Yah, reckon you sail on me and I jam yo haid in dat spring lak a fence post and drown'd you.

PUNY—[*His anger smoldering.*] Talk is cheap, black man, cheap!

Suddenly afraid of his boldness in replying he turns and looks at BUD *in a weak pleading defiance.*

BUD—[*Making a frightening movement towards him.*] Mess wid me a jowing and I knock yo' teef th'ough yo' skull.

LIJE—Hyuh, Bud, you let Puny 'lone.

He moves over to his bucket, gets it and sits down on the log at the left.

BUD—[*Turning for his bucket with a movement of disgust.*] Sho' I ain't gwine hurt him—po' pitiful bow-legs.

PUNY *clenches his hands as if stung to the quick, and then beaten and forlorn reaches for his bucket, the weak member of the herd. He throws off his overall jacket, revealing himself stripped to the waist, and sits down at the pine tree.*

LIJE—[*Laying out his food and singing.*]

'Way, 'way up in de Rock of Ages
In God's bosom gwine be my pillah.

BUD—[*Looking at* PUNY'S *bony bust.*] Uhp, showing off dat 'oman's breast o' yo'n, is you? Haw-haw.

PUNY—[*In sheer ineffectuality answering him blandly.*] Gwine cool myse'f.

LIJE—Me too, peoples. [*He loosens his belt, pulls out his shirt-tails, undoes his shirt, and pats his*

belly.] Lawd, Bud, you sho' led us a race dis mawning on dem dere boxes. Musta sweat a peck er mo'.

BUD—[*Taking his bucket and sitting on the ground near the center.*] Race? Hunh, wait till fo' o'clock dis evening, you gwine call foh de ca'f rope, sho' 'nough. [*Tickled at the tribute to his powers.*] And po' Puny, de monkey have rid him to deaf.

PUNY—Ain't no monkey rid me, I tells you. Little but loud. Be raght dere when de hawn blows.

BUD—Mought, and you slubbering yo' work. I cawners my boxes lak de Colonel calls foh. You des' gi' 'em a lick and a promise. Ain't it so, Lije?

LIJE—[*Swallowing a hunk of bread.*] Dunno, dunno. He do all right, reckon.

PUNY—Putt us in de cotton patch, and I kin kill you off de way a king snake do a lizard.

BUD—Picking cotton! Dat 'oman and chillun's job, no reg'lar man mess wid dat. [*Waving his hand at the woods behind him.*] Turpentining's de stuff.

They fall to devouring their food, peas, side-meat, molasses poured in the top of the bucket-lid from a bottle, bread and collards. The ax of a fourth hand is heard still thudding in the forest.

LIJE—[*Jerking his bread-filled hand behind him.*] Whyn't Abe come on? Time he eating.

BUD—Let him rair. 'On't hurt hisself a-cutting. Gitting to be de no 'countest hand I ever see.

LIJE—Useter could cut boxes lak a house a-fiah.

PUNY—And hack! Lawd, dat nigger could hack.

LIJE—De champeen o' de woods and de swamps.

PUNY—Bedder'n Bud, bedder'n all. Knowed him to dip eight barrels many day.

BUD—Cain't he'p whut has been. Ain't wuth my ol' hat now. Colonel Mack say so too. And I heahd Mr. Lonnie talking rough to him over at de weaving house day 'fo' yistiddy 'bout his gitting trifling heah lately.

PUNY—Been gitting no' count since two yeah 'go, de time when de white folks hang dat nigger Sampson on a telegram pole—him whut 'tacked a white 'oman, and dey shoot him full o' holes, ayh!

BUD—Dey did. And dat Abe got his neck stretched hadn't been foh de Colonel. Fool went down dere in de night and cut dat nigger down and bury 'im hese'f. Gohd A'mighty!

LIJE—[*Looking around him.*] 'Twon't do to mess wid white folks and dey r'iled up.

BUD—[*Gently.*] You said it, bruvver.

PUNY—[*Looking around him.*] Won't do. Keep to yo' work, da's all.

BUD—Yeh, work, work foh 'em. Git yo' money and yo' meat, push on th'ough, ax no questions, no sass, keep to yo' work.

LIJE—Nigger keep mouf shet, let white man do talking, he safe den.

BUD—Safe! You done said. No telegram poles, no shooting, no fiah burn um.

PUNY—Safe is best.

They lapse into silence under the touch of worry, something undefinable, something not to be thought upon. They swallow their food heavily. Presently LIJE *stops and looks at the ground.*

LIJE—Abe ain't safe.

BUD—Ayh?

LIJE—[*Gesturing vaguely behind him.*] Abe talk too much.

BUD—[*Nodding.*] He do, talk too much to white folks.

PUNY—Cain't he'p it, I bet.

BUD—Kin too. Didn't talk too much 'fore dat boy wuh hung. Worked hard den and say nothing.

LIJE—Sump'n on he mind. Sump'n deep, worry 'im, trouble.

BUD—Trouble 'bout de nigger, wanter rise up wid eddication,—fact!

PUNY—Hunh, rise him up to git a rope roun' his neck. Nigger's place down de bottom. He de mud sill. Abe git buried in his own graveyard, don't mind.

BUD—Raght on de bottom wid deir hands and hoofs, muscles, power, backbone, down wid de rocks and de shovels and de digging, dat's de nigger. White man on top.

LIJE—You's talking gospel.

PUNY—Abe say he gwine climb. I heah him tell de Colonel dat.

BUD—Fo' God! Whut de Colonel say?

PUNY—He ain't say nothing, des' look at 'im.

LIJE—Abe is bad mixed up all down inside.

BUD—White and black make bad mixtry.

LIJE—Do dat. [*Thumping on his chest.*] Nigger down heah. [*Thumping his head.*] White mens up heah. Heart say do one thing, head say 'nudder. Bad, bad.

PUNY—De white blood in him coming to de top. Dat make him wanta climb up and be sump'n. Nigger gwine hol' him down dough. Part of him lak

de Colonel, part lak his muh, 'vision and misery inside.

LIJE—Ssh!

PUNY—[*Starting and looking around.*] Colonel Mack he daddy, everybody knows. Lak as two peas, see de favor.

BUD—[*Bitingly.*] Talk too much! Little bird drop de news in de Colonel's yeah and he fall on you and scrush you. Ain't nigger, ain't white whut ail him. Dem damn books he gut to studying last yeah or two. Cain't go to de woods widdout 'em. Look up dere on his bucket, foh Christ' sake! [*He points to the remaining tin bucket in the bush. A small book is lying on the top under the handle. Snorting.*] 'Rifmatic I bet. Give a nigger a book and des' well shoot him. All de white folks tell you dat.

PUNY—[*Pouring molasses on his bread.*] He sma't dough, in his haid. Dat nigger gut sense.

LIJE—Has dat. Gitting so he kin cipher raght up wid de Colonel.

PUNY—[*Looking at* BUD.] Bet some day Colonel Mack putt him woods boss over us.

BUD—Ain't no nigger gwine boss me, hoss cake. Split him to de straddle wid my ax.

LIJE—[*Leaning back and emitting a halloo.*]

Heighp, you, Abe! Dinner! Gwine cut all day?

BUD—Gi' him de full title and he'll heah you.

LIJE—[*Grinning.*] Aberham, Aberham McCranie.

PUNY—Yeh, you, Aberham Lincoln, you man whut p—d freedom on de nigger, you better git yo' grub!

An answering shout comes out of the forest.

BUD—Trying to cut past time, mebbe us'll think he sma't.

PUNY—Don't keer whut you think, Bud. Gitting so he look down on you and de rest of us.

BUD—Damn yo' runty soul, whut you know 'bout it? Ain't no nigger living kin look down on me and git by wid it. Do, and I make 'em smell o' dat.

He clenches his heavy fist and raises it to heaven.

PUNY—Jesus Christ! Dat Abe take you up in one hand and frail yo' behime to a blister.

LIJE—Whut make you two black-gyard so much?

BUD—[*To* PUNY.] Keep on, keep on, little man. Some dese days you gwine come missing.

He crams a handful of cornbread in his mouth.

LIJE—Try a little fist and skull and work de bile out'n yo' systems.

BUD—[*Spitting in scorn.*] Ain't gwine bruise my fistes on his skull. Don't 'speck to notice him no mo'. [*He eats in huge mouthfuls.*] But he bedder quit th'owing dat Abe in my face, I tells him dat.

PUNY—Don't see why dat make you mad.

BUD—It do dough. I don't lak him and his uppity ways, I don't.

PUNY—Hunh, and you wus one o' de fust to brag on him foh going on sho't rations so de Colonel buy him books and learn 'im to teach school.

BUD—Sho't rations. Ain't no sho't rations and dat Goldie gal bringing him pies and stuff eve'y day. Be here wid de bucket in a few minutes, I betcha. Fool love de ve'y ground de squats on! And he look down on her caze her ign'ant. And teach school! Been heahing dat school teaching business de whole yeah. He ain't gwine teach no school. Niggers 'on't send to him, dey 'on't. Niggers don't want no schooling.

PUNY—Mought. Abe told me dis mawning dat de Colonel gwine fix it wid de 'missioners or sump'n in Lillington to-day. I know whut de matter wid you, Bud, hee-hee.

BUD—Whut?

PUNY—[*Hesitating.*] Abe come riding by in two-

hoss coach. Us'll be bowing and a-scraping. Us'll pull off'n our hats and be "Howdy, Mister Aberham." [BUD *turns and looks at him with infinite scorn, saying nothing.*] And, Bud? [BUD *makes no answer.*] Bud?

BUD—Whut?

PUNY—Dat Goldie business whut worrying you, hee-hee. She love Abe and—

BUD—[*Bounding up and kicking* PUNY'S *basket and food into the bushes.*] Damn yo' lousy soul, 'minner mind stomp you in de dirt!

He towers over the terrified PUNY *who lies flat on his back whimpering.*

PUNY—Don't hit me, Bud. Foh Gohd's sake! I des' joking.

LIJE—Go at it, fight it out.

BUD—[*Kicking dirt at* PUNY *and going back to his bucket.*] Done told him now. Ain't gwine say no mo'! Next time be my fist rammed down his th'oat, and turn him wrong-side out'ards.

ABE *comes in at the right, carrying his ax. He is a young mulatto of twenty-five or six, tall and powerfully built, dressed much like the others in cap and turpentine-glazed clothes. He puts his ax by the pine at the right, pulls off his cap and fans him-*

self, while he pinches his sweaty shirt loose from his skin. His shaggy head, forehead and jaw are marked with will and intelligence. But his wide nostril and a slumbrous flash in his eye that now and then shows itself suggest a passionate and dangerous person when aroused. From the change in the actions of the others when he enters it is evident that they respect and even fear him.

ABE—What's the trouble 'tween you and Puny, Bud?

BUD—[*Sullenly.*] Ain't no trouble.

PUNY—[*Crawling around on the ground and collecting his spilled food.*] Ain't nothing, Abe, I des' spilled my rations.

ABE *gets his book and seats himself in the shade at the left. He begins working problems, using a stub of a pencil and a sheet of crumpled paper.*

LIJE—Puny, I got some bread left you kin have.

He pulls a harp from his pocket and begins to blow softly.

PUNY—[*Straightening out his mashed bucket and closing it.*] I don't want nothing else, Lije. Et all I kin hold. [*After a moment.*] Putt yo' bucket up foh you.

He gets LIJE'S *bucket and hangs it along with his own in the limby bush.* BUD *eats in silence, puts up*

his bucket, gets a drink from the spring, and resumes his seat, hanging his head between his knees and now and then spitting sharply through his teeth. PUNY *goes to the spring and drinks.*

BUD—[*Pouring snuff into his lip.*] Don't fall in an' git drownded, Puny.

PUNY—Want some water, Lije?

He goes to the log, curls himself up in the shade beside it and prepares to sleep.

LIJE—[*Stirring lazily.*] Believe I does.

He goes to the spring and drinks, returns to the pine tree and sits down.

PUNY—Ain't you gwine eat no dinner, Abe?

ABE *makes no reply.*

LIJE—Call him again. [*Touching his head with his finger.*] Deep, deep up dere.

PUNY—Heigh, Abe, bedder eat yo' grub.

ABE—[*Starting.*] You call me?

PUNY—You so deep stud'in' didn't heah me. Bedder eat yo' dinner. Git full o' ants setting up dere.

ABE—I going to eat later.

BUD—Yeh, when Goldie come.

ABE—Hunh?

BUD—You heahd me.

ABE—[*Irritably.*] Don't let me heah no mo'.

BUD—Hunh?

ABE—You heahd me. [PUNY *snickers from his log with audible delight.* LIJE *waits a moment and then lies down.* BUD *reaches out and tears a bush from the ground and casts it angrily from him.*] I'll eat my dinner when it please me, you gentlemens allowing. [*There is a touch of anger in his voice which he apparently regrets on second thought, for he goes on more kindly.*] Goldie said she going to fetch me sump'n t'eat to-day. I got to work dis problem. Been on it two days now. Cain't git it out'n my head. Ain't been able to sleep two nights. [BUD *sits staring and spitting straight before him. Presently* LIJE *begins to snore; then* PUNY *follows.* ABE *goes on with his figuring.* BUD *turns over on the ground and goes to sleep.* ABE *becomes more and more absorbed in the problem he is working. He mutters to himself.*] How many sheep? How many sheep? [*He clutches at his hair, gnaws his pencil, and turns to the back of his book.*] Answer say fifteen. Cain't make it come out fifteen, cain't, seem lak, to save me. Man must have answer wrong. Six go into fo'teen, three, no, two times and two over. [*His voice dies away as he becomes lost in his work. Presently his face begins to light up. He figures*

faster. Suddenly he slaps his knee.] Dere whah I been missing it all de time. I carried two 'stid o' one. Blame fool I is. [*He hits the side of his head with his knuckles. In his excitement he calls out.*] Puny, I gitting dat answer. [*But* PUNY *is snoring away. In a moment he throws down his book with beaming face.*] I got it, folkses, I got it. Fifteen! Dat white man know whut he doing. He all time git dem answer right. [*He turns expectantly towards* LIJE.] Lije, I got it. [LIJE *makes no answer. He turns towards* PUNY *again, starts to speak, but sees he is asleep.*] Bud! [*But* BUD *makes no answer. The heavy breathing of the sleepers falls regularly upon his ears. His face sinks into a sort of hopeless brooding.*] Yeh, sleep, sleep, sleep yo' life away. I figger foh you, foh me, foh all de black in de world to lead 'em up out'n ignorance. Dey don't listen, dey don't heah me, dey in de wilderness, don't wanta be led. Dey sleep, sleep in bondage. [*He bows his head between his knees.*] Sleep in sin. [*Presently.*] Time me to eat.

He reaches for his bucket and is about to open it when PUNY *springs high into the air with a squeak of terror, and begins rolling over and over in the leaves and briars.*

PUNY—Come heah, folkses, come heah git dis thing off'n me.

He clutches at his breeches. LIJE *and* BUD *start up and out of their sleep.*

LIJE—Who dat run-mad man?

BUD—Dat damn Puny, sump'n in he britches!

ABE—Be still, Puny, I git it out. [*He goes up to the frightened* PUNY, *reaches down his trousers and pulls out a mouse.*] Nothing but a little bitty old field mice.

He throws the mouse with a crushing plop against the pine tree. LIJE *and* BUD *break into roaring laughter.* PUNY *sits down exhausted, fanning himself angrily.*

PUNY—Laugh, laugh, all o' you. Dat thing bite same as mud turkle. Yeh, funny, funny lak hell to you.

He snaps his mouth closed and fans himself the more furiously. A loud shout comes from off left.

ABE—Stop yo' laughing, I heah somebody hollering.

A second halloo comes down the hill.

PUNY—Dat's de Colonel and Mr. Lonnie!

BUD—Sound lak 'em. Da's who 'tis.

ABE—[*Going off at the left.*] Heah we is, Colonel Mack, at de spring eating dinner! [*He comes back*

in.] Colonel Mack and Mr. Lonnie coming on down heah.

PUNY—Co'se. Gut to see how many boxes us cleaned up dis mawning.

ABE—He tells me 'bout de school now. [*He stirs around him in his excitement.*] Mebbe dat his main business heah in de middle o' de day.

BUD—Hunh. Mebbe. Gut some special work he want done. Wanter hurry us to it, dat's whut.

The sound of voices is heard approaching from the left, and almost immediately the COLONEL *and* LONNIE *come in. The* COLONEL *carries a riding whip. He is a stout run-down old Southerner with all the signs of a moral and intellectual decadence upon him. Lechery, whisky, and levity of living have taken their toll of him, and yet his actions show he has retained a kind of native good-naturedness. His shirt front and once pointed beard are stained with the drippings of tobacco juice. There is something in his bearing and in the contour of his face that resembles* ABE. *His son, a heavyish florid young man of twenty-three or four, walks behind him.*

COLONEL MCCRANIE—[*In a high jerky voice.*] Snoozing, hanh?

ABE—Just finishing our dinner, suh.

PUNY—Us 'bout to wuk overtime to-day, Colonel.

COLONEL—Not likely, I reckon. Say, I want you fellows, all four of you, to get over to the swamp piece on Dry Creek. Boxes there are running over, two quarts in 'em apiece, prime virgin. [*They begin to move to their feet.*] No, I don't mean to go right now. Gabe's coming by on the big road there [*Jerking his whip towards the rear.*] with a load of barrels and the dippers in about a half-hour. Meet him out there.

LONNIE—Yeh, we want to git the wagons off to Fayetteville to-night.

COLONEL—How you get on cornering this morning, Bud?

BUD—Purty good, suh. Us done 'bout all dat pastuh piece.

COLONEL—Fine, fine. That's the way. Puny and Lije stay with you?

BUD—Raght dere eve'y jump.

LIJE—Yessuh, yessuh.

PUNY—When he gi' de call us gi' de 'sponse eve'y time, suh. Yes, suh, us kept 'im crowded.

COLONEL—We got to git on, Lonnie. Want to see how the scrape's coming over on Uncle Joe's

Branch. Be up on the road there in half an hour, you boys.

LONNIE—[*Stopping as they go out.*] Got so you doing any better work lately, Abe?

ABE—[*Starting.*] Suh?

LONNIE—You heard me.

ABE—Didn't understand you, Mr. Lonnie.

LONNIE—You understood me all right. [*Pointing to the book on the ground.*] Let them damned books worry you still?

COLONEL—Come on, Lonnie.

ABE—[*Stammering.*] I dunno—I——

COLONEL—Still holding out on short rations, ain't you, Abe?

There is the least hint of pride in the Colonel's voice.

ABE—[*Somewhat in confusion.*] I studying whut I kin. Slow go, slow go.

COLONEL—Stick to it. You the first nigger I ever see so determined. But then you're uncommon! [*The Colonel moves on.*] Come on, Lonnie.

ABE—[*Following somewhat timidly after him.*]

Colonel Mack, did di— you—what'd dey say over dere 'bout dat little school business?

COLONEL—Bless my soul, 'bout to forgit it. I talked it over with the board and most of 'em think maybe we'd better not try it yet.

ABE—[*His face falling.*] When dey say it might be a good time? I gitting right 'long wid dat 'rithmatic and spelling and reading. I kin teach de colored boys and gals a whole heap right now, and I'll keep studying.

COLONEL—[*Impatiently.*] Oh, I dunno. Time'll come mebbe. Mebbe the time won't come. [*He moves on.*]

ABE—Cain't you git 'em to let me try it awhile? Reckon——

COLONEL—I don't know, I tell you. Got my business on my mind now.

LONNIE—He's done told you two or three times, can't you hear?

ABE—[*His eyes flashing and his voice shaking with sudden uncontrollable anger.*] Yeh, yeh, I hear 'im. Dem white folks don't keer—dey——

LONNIE—[*Stepping before him.*] Look out! None of your sass. Pa's already done more for you than

you deserve. He even stood up for you and they laughing at him there in Lillington.

ABE—[*Trembling.*] Yeh, yeh, I knows. But dem white folks don't think,—I going to show 'em, I——

LONNIE—[*Pushing himself before him.*] Dry up. Not another word.

ABE—[*His voice almost breaking into a sob.*] Don't talk to me lak dat, Mr. Lonnie. Stop him, Colonel Mack, 'fore I hurt him.

The other negroes draw off into a knot by the pine tree, mumbling in excitement and fear.

COLONEL—Stop, Lonnie! Abe, don't you talk to my son like that.

LONNIE—By God, I'm going to take some of the airs off'n him right now. You've gone around here getting sorrier and more worthless every day for the last year. What you need is a good beating, and I'm gonna give it to you.

He steps backward and snatches the whip from his father's hand.

COLONEL—Stop that, Lonnie!

LONNIE—Keep out of this, Pa. [*He comes towards* ABE.] I'll beat his black hide off'n him.

ABE—Keep 'im back dere, Colonel Mack. I mought kill him! Keep 'im off.

LONNIE—Kill him! All right, do it. There, damn your dirty soul!

He strikes ABE *across the face with his whip. With a snarl* ABE *springs upon him, tears the whip from his hands and hurls him headlong into the thicket of briars and bushes. Then he stands with his hands and head hanging down, his body shaking like one with the palsy.*

PUNY—[*Screaming.*] You done kilt Mr. Lonnie! Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy!

COLONEL—[*Running to Lonnie who is crawling up out of the mud with his clothes and skin torn. He is sobbing and cursing.*] Are you hurt? How bad are you hurt?

LONNIE—Let me git at that son of a bitch and I'll kill him dead. [*Moaning.*] Oh, I'll beat his brains out with one o' them axes.

COLONEL—If you ain't dead, you'd better keep your hands off'n him. I'll fix him. [*He reaches down and picks up the whip. Thundering.*] Git down on your knees, Abe McCranie! Git down, you slave, I'm gonna beat you.

ABE *jerks his head up in defiance, but before the*

stern face of the COLONEL *his strength goes out of him. He puts out his hands in supplication.*

ABE—Don't beat me, Colonel Mack, don't beat me wid dat whip!

COLONEL—Git down on your knees! I've beat many a slave, and I'll beat you, you fool!

He strikes him several blows.

ABE—[*Falling on his knees.*] Oh, Lawd, have muhcy upon me!

The COLONEL *begins to beat him blow upon blow.* PUNY, BUD *and* LIJE *stand near the pine in breathless anxiety.*

PUNY—De Colonel 'll kill 'im!

BUD—[*Seizing his arm.*] Shet dat mouf, nigger!

COLONEL—[*As he brings the whip down.*] Let this be a lesson to you to the end of your life!

ABE—[*His back twitching under the whip, his voice broken.*] Muhcy, Colonel Mack, muhcy!

COLONEL—You struck a white man; you struck my son.

ABE—[*Raising his tear-stained face.*] I yo' son, too; you my daddy.

He throws himself down before him, embracing his

feet. The COLONEL *lowers the whip, then throws it behind him.*

LONNIE—[*His voice husky with rage.*] You hear what he say? Hear what he called you?

He seizes the whip and in a blind rage strikes the prostrate ABE *again and again.*

COLONEL—[*Stepping between them with a shout.*] Stop it! Give me that whip. [LONNIE *reluctantly hands him the whip.*] Go on back out to the road and wait for me. Trot! [*He threatens his son with the whip and finally* LONNIE *goes off at the left nursing his face in his arms.*] Get up, Abe. Get up, I say.

ABE *sits up, hugging his face between his knees. The* COLONEL *wets his handkerchief in the spring, and with his hands on* ABE'S *head bathes the bruises on his neck and shoulders.*

ABE—[*In a voice grown strangely dignified and quiet.*] Thank 'ee, thank 'ee, Colonel Mack.

COLONEL—[*Breathing heavily.*] Thanky nothing. I had to beat you, Abe, had to. Think no more about it. Dangerous thing, hitting a white man. But this is the end of it. Won't be no law, nothing but this. Put some tar and honey on yourself to-night and you'll be all right to-morrow. [*The bushes are suddenly parted at the rear and a tall sinuous young*

mulatto woman bounds through. She carries a bucket in her hand. At the sight of the COLONEL *bathing* ABE'S *head and neck she rushes forward with a low cry. The* COLONEL *turns towards her.*] Now, Goldie, ain't no use cutting up. Abe been in a little trouble. Nothing much.

GOLDIE—[*Moaning.*] I heahd de racket and I 'fraid somebody being kilt. Is you hurt bad, Abe, honey babe? [*She bends tenderly over him, her hand running over his hair.*] Who hurt you, honey, who hurt you?

COLONEL—[*Handing* GOLDIE *his handkerchief.*] Look after him, Goldie. [*He goes out at the left calling.*] Wait a minute, Lonnie!

GOLDIE—Whut dey do to you, Abe? Who hurt you? [*All the while she is rubbing his neck, dabbing his shoulders with the handkerchief, and cooing over him.*] Whyn't you kill dem white mens if dey hurt you? You kin do it, break 'em lak broomstraws.

ABE—[*Standing up.*] Ain't nobody hurt me. I crazy dat's whut, crazy in de haid. Ain't nobody hurt me.

GOLDIE—[*Clinging to him.*] You is hurt, hurt bad. Look at yo' po' neck and shoulders. Look at 'em, beat wid great whales on 'em!

ABE—[*Growling.*] Ain't nobody hurt me, I tell you.

GOLDIE—Lay yo'sef down heah and let me smoove off yo' forehead and putt some cold water on dat mark crost yo' face. Please'm, Abe.

ABE—[*Suddenly crying out in a loud voice.*] I ain't nothing, nothing. Dat white man beat me, beat me lak a dawg. [*His voice rising into a wail.*] He frail me lak a suck-egg dawg! [*He rocks his head from side to side in a frenzy of wrath.*] Lemme git to him! [*He falls on his knees searching in the leaves and finds a stone.* GOLDIE *stands wringing her hands and moaning. He jumps to his feet, raising the stone high above his head.*] Lemme git to him, I scrush his God damn head lak a egg shell!

He moves to left to follow the COLONEL. GOLDIE *throws her arms around his neck.*

GOLDIE—No, no, you ain't gwine out dere, Abe, Abe!

PUNY—[*Crying out.*] Stop him, Bud! Lije, keep him back!

LIJE—[*Coming from the pine tree.*] Hyuh, now you, Abe, stop dat.

BUD—[*Moving quickly before him and blocking his path.*] Stop dat, fool. You gwine fix to git yo'se'f hung up on a telegram pole. Body so full o' holes it sift sand.

GOLDIE—[*Sobbing.*] Don't do it, Abe, sugar babe. [*She throws herself upon his breast.*]

BUD—[*Reaching towards her.*] Seem lak you mought take yo'se'f off'n dat man!

ABE—[*Pulling her arms from around him.*] Lemme loose, lemme loose. [*After a moment he throws the stone down.*] I ain't going to do nothing.

He sits down on the log at the left, holding his head in his hands.

GOLDIE—[*Bringing her bucket.*] Hyuh, eat sump'n, Abe, you feel better. I gut some pie and some cake in heah foh you.

PUNY—[*Stepping back and forth in senseless excitement.*] Somebody gwine git kilt at dis heah mess, somebody——

ABE—[*Pushing* GOLDIE *away.*] I ain't want nothing t'eat, ain't hongry.

LIJE—Bedder eat, Abe. Git yo' stren'th back.

ABE—[*Savagely.*] Ain't hongry, I keep telling you.

GOLDIE *falls on her knees beside him and dropping her head in his lap clasps her arms around him.*

GOLDIE—[*Sobbing softly.*] Oh, boy, boy, why dey beat you up so? Whut you do to 'em?

ABE—Fool, fool I is. Crazy, dat's it.

BUD—[*Sharply.*] He gi'n Mr. Lonnie and de Colonel back talk. Cain't sass white mens and git 'way wid it. Abe orter know better.

LIJE *wanders over to the right blowing his harp softly and forlornly.*

PUNY—[*Sitting down on the ground.*] Cain't be done, Abe, cain't.

BUD.—[*Stripping leaves from a bush and watching* GOLDIE *as she carries on over* ABE.] Hyuh, 'oman, stop dat r'aring. [*Muttering to himself.*] Neveh see two bigger fools.

ABE *puts his hands mechanically on* GOLDIE'S *shoulders and begins stroking her.*

ABE—Stop it, baby. Ain't no use to cry.

PUNY *sits with his mouth open in astonishment watching them.* LIJE *lays himself back on the ground and blows his harp, apparently no longer interested.*

BUD—[*Jealousy rising within him.*] Heigh, Goldie, git up from dat man's lap. He ain't keer nothing foh you. [GOLDIE'S *sobs die away and she is quiet.*] He say you foolish many time. He look down on you.

GOLDIE—[*Raising her tear-stained face.*] How you

know? You jealous, Bud Gaskins. He better man dan you. Wuth a whole field full of you. [*Catching* ABE *by the hand and picking up her bucket.*] Come on, come on, honey, le's go off dere in de woods and eat our dinner by ourse'fs. Leave dis low-down trash.

BUD—[*Coming up to her.*] Hyuh, you stay out'n dat woods wid him, nigger.

ABE—[*Standing up.*] Yeh, yeh, I come wid you.

He moves as one in a dream and reaches out and knocks BUD *behind him.*

GOLDIE—[*Her face alight, a sort of reckless and unreal abandonment upon her.*] I knows where dere's a cool place under a big tree. And dey's cool green moss dere and soft leaves. Le's go dere, boy. I gwine tend to you and feed you. [*She moves towards the right, leading* ABE *like a child.*] We make us a bed dere, honey. [LIJE *sits up watching them.*] Us fohgit de 'membance o' all dis trouble. [*A kind of ecstasy breaking in her voice.*] Dere de birds sing and we hear de little branch running over de rocks. Cool dere, sweet dere, you kin sleep, honey, rest dere, baby. Yo' mammy, yo' chile gwine love you, make you fohgit.

ABE—[*Wildly.*] Yeh, yeh, I come wid you. I don't keer foh nothing, not nothing no mo'. You, des' you'n me.

GOLDIE—Ain't no worl', ain't no Lije and Bud, nobody. Us gwine make us a' 'biding place and a pillah under dat green tree. [*In sweet oblivion.*] Feel yo' arms around me, my lips on yo'n. We go singing up—up to heaben, honey, togedder—togedder.

They go off, her voice gradually dying away like a nun's chant.

BUD—[*Breaking a sapling in his grasp.*] Gwine off, gwine off in de woods togedder dere lak hawgs.

PUNY—[*Bounding up, his body shaking in lascivious delight.*] I gwine watch 'em—hee—hee—— I gwine watch 'em.

LIJE—[*Snatching him back.*] Bedder stay out'n dat woods. Abe kill you.

PUNY—[*Standing up by the pine tree.*] Kin see 'em, her still a-leading 'im.

LIJE—[*Standing up and peering off to the right.*] Dere on de cool moss and de sof' leaves.

BUD—[*Stripping the limbs from the top of the broken sapling.*] Ain't gwine look. Dey fools, bofe fools. [*Raging out.*] Dere she go playing de hawg. Didn't know she lak dat. [*He sucks in his breath with the sound of eating something.*] Wisht to Gohd I knowed she lak dat. I de man foh her. Bud Gaskins. I tame her. Gohd damn her, I tame her down and take dat speerit out'n her.

He crowds out his chest and walks up and down.

PUNY—[*Grasping* LIJE'S *arm.*] Cain't hardly see 'em no mo', kin you?

LIJE—Kin hardly.

BUD—[*His anger and jealousy disappearing in physical emotion and curiosity.*] Whah dey now?

LIJE—[*Pointing.*] Dere, dere, dey crossing de branch now.

PUNY—[*Breathlessly.*] I see 'em. I see 'em. He arm 'round her now, her head on he shoulder. [*He capers in his excitement.*] Lawd, lawd!

BUD—[*With a loud brutal laugh as he slaps* LIJE *on the back.*] On de sof' green moss.

LIJE—[*Laughing back and dragging his harp across his mouth.*] Whah de leaves is cool.

PUNY—Cain't see 'em no mo'. [*He whirls about and turns a handspring.*] Whoopee, folkses! Gwine run away wid myse'f!

181255

BUD—[*His eyes shining.*] Down whah de branch water run.

He shuffles a jig among the leaves.

LIJE—[*Blowing upon his harp.*] Singing raht up to heaben!

He plays more wildly as they all drop into a barbaric dance.

PUNY—Heaben!

BUD—Jesus, Lawd, Fadder and Son!

LIJE—[*Singing loudly as they dance.*]

My feets wuh wet wid de sunrise dew
De mawning stah wuh a witness too.
'Way 'way up in de Rock of Ages,
In God's bosom gwine be my pillah.

They gambol, turn and twist, run on all fours, rear themselves up on their haunches, cavort like goats.

PUNY—In God's bosom—hanh!

BUD—In who bosom?

LIJE—In who bosom, bubber?

A loud halloo comes down from the hill in the rear, unnoticed by them.

PUNY—In Goldie's bosom.

BUD and LIJE—Haw-haw-haw! Hee-hee-hee! In God's bosom gwine be my pillah.

The halloo is repeated.

LIJE—[*Jerking up his head.*] Hyuh, dere dat Gabe calling us. Better git, or de Colonel have dat stick on our back.

They gather up their buckets and axes. PUNY *clambers up the pine a few feet and drops to the ground.*

BUD—Kin see?

PUNY—See nothing. Hee-hee!

LIJE—Gut to leave 'em now. Abe ketch it 'g'in don't mind out—he not coming wid us.

BUD—He done foh now. Dat gal gut him hard and fast. [*Snorting scornfully.*] Books. Books! Rise 'em up, lak hell. Hunh, he gone to de bottom lak a rock!

LIJE—I done told you. Heart say dis, head say dat. Bad mixtry, bad. Crazy!

PUNY—[*Shouting.*] Heigh, you Gabe! Coming! [*They move out at the rear up the hill, singing, laughing and jostling each other.*]

> 'Way, 'way down by de sweet branch water
> In her bosom gwine be he pillah!

Hee-hee—haw—haw!

Their loud brutally mocking laughter floats back behind them.

WHITE DRESSES

"Low is de way to de upper bright world. . . ."
—Negro song

CHARACTERS

GRANNY MCLEAN—*an old Negro woman.*
MARY MCLEAN—*her granddaughter.*
JIM MATTHEWS—*in love with Mary.*
HENRY MORGAN—*a white man and landlord.*

TIME—*The evening before Christmas several years ago.*
PLACE—*The home of Granny McLean in eastern North Carolina.*

WHITE DRESSES

IN *the huge fireplace of a Negro cabin on a cold winter night a small fire is burning, lighting up with flickering flames the poverty-stricken interior of a comfortless room. Here and there on the rough-planked walls hang bright illustrations, striving in a crude way to beautify the place. A few chairs are in the room and a small eating-table is in the center.* GRANNY MCLEAN, *a big, bony, black, old woman comes in at the rear door, walking with the aid of a cane and carrying several sticks of firewood under her arm. She is dressed in a slat bonnet, which hides her face in its shadows, brogan shoes, a man's ragged coat, checkered apron, and dark-colored dress. After much straining and grunting, she puts the wood on the fire, and then takes the poker and examines some potatoes cooking in the ashes. Hanging her bonnet on the chair behind her, she takes out her snuffbox and fills her lip. In the firelight her features are discernible—sunken eyes, high cheek bones, and big flat nose. On her forehead she wears steel-rimmed spectacles.*

She sits down in the rocking chair, now and then putting her hand to her head and groaning. For a moment she pats her foot nervously on the floor, and then gets up and opens the door. She stands looking out at the gathering dusk.

GRANNY—[*Muttering.*] Why don' dat gal come on hyuh!

She closes the door and looks restlessly around the room. Hobbling over to a chest, she rakes newspapers and catalogues to the floor, and taking a key from around her neck, opens the chest and lifts out a small black oblong box. Then she returns again to the fire and sits down, her fingers drumming on the lid of the box. She takes another key from the string around her neck and starts to unlock it. At that moment the door at the rear opens quickly and MARY MCLEAN *comes in with a "turn" of collards and a bundle in her arms. She lays the collards on the floor near the door and puts the bundle on the bed. She is a light, cream-colored girl about eighteen years old, with an oval face and dark straight hair neatly done up. Her dress is shabby.*

GRANNY—[*Suddenly springing up in confusion and then sitting back down with her hand to her hip.*] Oh—mah back!

She hides the box under her apron.

MARY—How you feeling, Granny?

GRANNY—I's tuck in mah l'ins. [*She tries to straighten up.*]

MARY—You hadn't ought to jump so quick; I ain't going to bother you about that old box.

GRANNY—Yeh, yeh, and I dunno. I thought you wa'n't a-coming a good wile yit. He'p me up a lil bit.

MARY *catches her by the arm and raises her. She putters over to the chest, locks the box away, and returns to her chair.*

MARY—[*Watching her.*] Ain't you never going to let me see what you got hid in that box?

GRANNY—Hush it, chile! I done told you I'd let you know when de time come. [*Shaking her head.*] And I's afea'd de time ain't fur off nuther.

MARY—[*Turning from hanging up her shawl.*] What you mean by that? All the week you been talking about something being not far off. What in the world is it?

GRANNY—Neveh you mind. Run on now and tell me why you stay up dere at Mis' Mawgin's so late.

MARY—[*Punching up the fire.*] She had such a big ironing and a lot of cleaning up for Christmas, I couldn't get through no quicker.

GRANNY—And me setting hyuh dese las' two hours wid mah haid busting open, and being oneasy 'bout my gal off wukking so ha'd.

MARY—But look what I brought you. [*She opens her hand and shows her a five-dollar bill.*]

GRANNY—Five dollahs! Lawd he'p mah life!

MARY—[*Bringing the package from the bed.*] And look what Mr.—Mr.—Morgan sent you. [*She undoes the package, revealing sausage, ham, and other cooked food.*] He said as 'twas Christmas time, he sent you all these things and the collards there.

GRANNY *reaches impulsively for the food, but drops her hand and sits blinking at* MARY.

GRANNY—Whah'd you git all dese things? [*Suspiciously.*] Whah'd you git dat 'ere money?

MARY—[*Stammering.*] They—they all sent it to you, I said.

GRANNY—[*Excitedly.*] Mr. Mawgin ain't de kind to be making free wid his money. And dey ain't no past Chris'mus he was so good to me lak dat, and you knows it, him a-having his washing done raght up on Chris'mus Eve. [*Sharply.*] Did Mr. Hugh gi'n you dat money?

MARY—He ain't give me nothing. It's every bit for you. When I was washing some of Mr. Hugh's shirts—and they was soft and shiny—he come out and handed me the money and said give it to you.

GRANNY—He'p mah soul and body, de boy said dat! He ain't fo'got his old granny since he gut to gwine off to school 'way yander.

MARY—[*Handing the money to* GRANNY *who takes it quickly.*] He said maybe when he'd made

a lot of money and got rich he'd send you more things than you could shake a stick at, like as not.

GRANNY—De Lawd bless his baby heart! Ain't he a sight to think o' me lak dat? He's a reg'lar Trojas. Allus was a good boy, and he ain't changed since he growed up nuther. Mind me when I used to nuss him, he'd neveh whimpeh, no, suh.

She rubs the bill in her hand. MARY *sits down and looks into the fire.*

MARY—[*After a moment.*] I bet he was a purty baby, won't he, Granny?

GRANNY—De fines' gwine. [*Turning to look at her.*] Why you ax dat?

MARY—I thought he must've been purty from—from the way he seems—

She looks at the fire without noticing the old woman's uneasy movement.

GRANNY—Listen hyuh. Don't you know you gut no call to be talking 'bout a white boy lak dat?

MARY—[*Getting up hastily.*] Time I was fixing your supper.

GRANNY—Didn't he g'in you nothing a-tall?

MARY—No'm, he didn't give me nothing.

She suddenly sits down, stifling a sob.

GRANNY—Hyuh, putt dis money in de pocket-book. Don't mind whut I's saying. I 'spects I's too 'tickleh 'bout you, I dunno. [*Looking around.*] What ails you, chile?

MARY—[*Wiping her eyes.*] Nothing, nothing.

She puts the money away, then lights the lamp. GRANNY *watches her perplexedly.*

GRANNY—[*Solicitously.*] Mah po' baby's been wukking too much.

MARY—I ain't neither. I feel fresh. You want me to fix your supper on the table?

GRANNY—No, suh-ree. Whut betteh do I want'n dis hyuh in mah lap?

She begins eating greedily. Suddenly she utters a low scream and puts her hand to her head.

MARY—It's your head again, ain't it? Now you rest easy. [*And she comes over and begins rubbing her cheeks and forehead.* GRANNY *becomes quiet and goes back to her eating.*] Set still while I git in a turn o' lightwood. It's going to be a cold night and looks like snow. [*She goes just outside the door and returns with an armful of wood which she throws down near the fireplace.*] You feel all right still?

GRANNY—Purty well. Dis hyuh victuals putts new life in me.

MARY—Now you see that spell didn't last no time. And it's like I keep telling you, you'll be well and back in the fields with the hoe-hands by spring.

GRANNY—[*Sharply.*] No, suh, I ain't long foh dis world. I's done my last washing and chopping and leading de gang in de fields.

MARY—You're always talking like that, and you'll live to be a hundred or more.

GRANNY—[*Licking her fingers.*] Dese is good spar' ribs and sa'sages sho' 'nough.

MARY *sits down again and stares before her with her chin in her hand.*

MARY—Don't it sorter make you feel lonesome and quare to be setting here to-night, just you'n me, and nobody in the world that cares nothing for us? Up at Mis' Morgan's they're all having——

GRANNY—Whut's dat? Whut's de matteh?

MARY—Not much of nothing.

GRANNY—You's worried. Dey's sump'n on yo' mind, ain't dey? [*With misgiving.*] Mr. Mawgin —he—ain't said nothing else 'bout us having to leave, has he?

MARY—No'm, no'm—he said—I don't think he's said no more of it.

GRANNY—[*Anxiously.*] You sho' 'bout dat?

MARY—[*Stolidly.*] Oh, he said to-day—he said maybe he'd let us stay right on here. [*Nervously.*] Something like that.

GRANNY—[*Listening.*] Talk louder, say dat ag'in.

MARY—He said it might be so we could stay as long as we pleased.

GRANNY—He did? [*Joyously.*] Thank de Lawd! Bless His holy name! I knowed Mr. Mawgin gwine do it. I knowed it. [*Soberly.*] But I been pow'ful skeahd he's gwine run us off—when Mr. Hugh gut to taking up foh us. Now I kin res' mah bones raght whah I wants to. [*Uncertainly.*] How come he change lak dat and say we could stay on? How come?

MARY—I dunno—just did, I reckon.

GRANNY—[*Looking at her keenly.*] Is you trying to keep de truf f'om me, hunh?

MARY—Shucks! It's going to be all right. Mr. Morgan didn't exactly say much about it. But Mr. Hugh, he said he'd look out for us, and he will too.

GRANNY *stops eating and sits in silence.*

GRANNY—[*Harshly, after a moment.*] Don' you say no mo' 'bout Mr. Hugh—heah me?—— You ain't even had nothing t'eat, has you?

MARY—Yes'm, I have too. They told me not to come off without eating, and I et.

GRANNY *rakes a potato from the ashes and begins peeling it.* MARY *turns restlessly in her chair. She goes over to the bureau, takes out a piece of pink ribbon and begins arranging her hair.*

GRANNY—[*Noticing her movements.*] Whut you dressing up foh? Is Jim coming round to-night?

She wraps up the remainder of her food and puts it in the chimney corner.

MARY—Yes'm, he'll be coming, I reckon. [*Scornfully.*] They ain't no getting away from him and his box.

GRANNY—[*Blowing on her potato.*] Whut you gut ag'in Jim? Dey ain't no betteh nigger'n Jim is. He's gwine treat you straight. And it's time you's gitting merried.

MARY—Don't start your talk about marrying. I ain't going to marry, and you know it well enough.

GRANNY—Whut keeps gitting into you? When I was yo' age, yo' mammy was a stropping young 'un pulling at mah breas'. Yessuh, I wants you to git

merried. I told you and told you. 'Tain't a good sign when a 'oman old as you ain't thinking o' gitting her a home. I's lak to nuss yo' li'l'-uns and sing to 'em 'fo' I go. Mind me o' de old times.

MARY—[*Bitterly.*] What's Jim Matthews for a husband with his gab?

GRANNY—Well, he works ha'd and saves his money.

MARY *finishes her hair and powders her face.* GRANNY *sits silently peeling her potatoes.*

MARY—[*Presently.*] Granny, you ain't seen nim since he come back. He's as kind and good to me as he can be.

GRANNY—[*Looking at her questioningly.*] Co'se he's kind and good.

MARY—[*Softly.*] And to-day he said 'twas a pity I had to work and wash like a dog for a living. He don't treat me like a—like a colored person. He acts same as if I was white.

GRANNY—[*Staring at her in troubled astonishment.*] I knows it, honey, Jim's solid to de bottom.

MARY—[*Vehemently.*] I ain't talking about Jim, I tell you.

GRANNY—Whut you mean! Who you talking 'bout?

MARY—Oh, nobody, like as not. [*Appealingly.*] I don't look like a common nigger, do I?

GRANNY—Lawd bless you, you sho' don't. You's purty as dey makes 'em—lak yo' po' mammy whut's daid and gone, 'ceptin' you's—mebbe whiteh.

MARY—I been thinking a whole heap lately. If I was to go 'way off, the people there might think I was real white folks, wouldn't they?

GRANNY—[*Rising from her seat in alarm.*] Gohd in heaben, chile! Whut's come oveh you?

MARY—I'm wore out with the mess of things, I am, I tell you! Didn't you never wish you was white?

GRANNY—Hesh, hesh, I says. [*Sitting down and turning her face away.*] Po' thing, po' chile, yo' mammy used to talk lak dat. Don' you say no sech words to me. Lawd in heaben!

MARY—But they ain't no use of talking. [*Helplessly.*] Talk won't change nothing. I cain't stand it no more!

GRANNY—[*Sternly.*] Hesh dat! [*Kindly.*] Honey chile, you listen to me. We's bofe niggehs, bawn niggehs and'll die niggehs. De Lawd He made us, and de Lawd He'll take us away and whut He does is raght. Now you trust in Him and rest easy.

MARY—No, no, I won't, I'll change it somehow, I will! [*A sound of stamping feet outside and a knock at the door.* MARY *brushes her hand across her face and calls out.*] Come in!

GRANNY—Who's dat?

MARY—Sounds like Jim.

JIM MATTHEWS *enters. He is a young Negro of twenty-two or three and as black as his African ancestors. He carries a guitar slung over his shoulder, wears an old derby hat, tan shirt with flowing tie, a well-worn blue suit, the coat of which comes nearly to his knees, and shoes slashed along the edges to make room for his feet. As he comes in, he pulls off his hat and smiles genially, showing his white teeth.*

JIM—Good evening, ladies. [*He lays his derby on the bed.*]

GRANNY—[*Turning in her chair.*] Whut does he say?

MARY—He says good evening.

GRANNY—Ah-hah! Good evening, Jim. Take a seat. I's sho' glad you come 'round. Mary's been talking 'bout you.

He smiles complacently and takes a seat between MARY *and* GRANNY.

JIM—Yeb'm, and I's sho' glad to be wid you all. [*Gallantly.*] I's allus glad to be wid de ladies.

GRANNY—Whut does he say?

JIM—[*More loudly.*] I's glad to be wid you all.

GRANNY—Ah-hah! [JIM *pulls out a large checkered handkerchief from his breast pocket, wipes his forehead and then flips the dust from his shoes. He folds it carefully and puts it back.*] Any news, Jim?

JIM—Nob'm, any wid you?

GRANNY—None a-tall. Yo' folks all well?

JIM—Peart and kicking. How you all come on?

GRANNY—Hah? I's purty feeble.

She groans and rocks to and fro.

JIM—Still having dem spells wid her haid, Mary?

MARY—[*Lowering her voice.*] You ought to know, you're here 'most every night. Yes, she has 'em and will till she's laid away for good.

She goes to GRANNY *and begins rubbing her head again.* GRANNY *waves her off.*

GRANNY—Ne' mind me now. You chillun go on wid yo' co'ting. I's gwine peel mah 'taters.

JIM *looks sheepishly at* MARY *and strums his*

guitar. He moves his chair nearer to her. She moves mechanically from him.

JIM—Uh—Mary, you's looking 'ceeding snatching in dat pink ribbon. Glad to see you's 'specting me 'round. Yeb'm, I tells all de gals you gut 'em beat to a frazzle. [MARY *pays no attention to him.*] F'om heah slam to France and back I ain't seed nobody lak you, and I's a old road niggeh and oughta know. [*He stops and fidgets in his chair.*] Mary, I——

MARY—Jim, I done told you forty times over you needn't come snooping around me. I ain't loving you, and I ain't going to marry you.

JIM—Now—uh—Mary, honey, I knows des' how you feels. And I ain't gwine give you up. I cain't heah you when you says no. To-day I was talking to dat young Hugh Mawgin, and he——

MARY—*Hugh Morgan!* Mr. Hugh Morgan, you mean.

JIM—[*Hurriedly.*] Yeh, yeh, Mr. Hugh.

MARY—What'd you say to him?

JIM—I told him I was calling heah 'casionally, and he said—he said——

He wilts before MARY'S *eyes.*

MARY—[*Eying him straightly.*] Go on, go on.

JIM—He axed me if I's a-co'ting, and I told him I—uh—mought be.

MARY—Did he seem glad that you was coming?

JIM—He said he 'spected to heah o' us being merried some dese days. [MARY *is silent.*] He 'lowed as how you was most too fine to be wukking yo' eyeballs out, and you needed a man to look adder you. I tuk f'om his talk dat he thought I'd fill de bill.

MARY—Oh, yes, I reckon you thought that.

JIM—He's a eddicated boy, and he sees my worf. Dey teaches him to know a heap 'way out yander at dat college place.

MARY—[*Springing up.*] Jim Matthews, you set there and talk like you owned the whole world and me to boot. Well, I tell you right now you don't! Before I'll marry a smut black nigger like you I'll die stone dead.

JIM *gasps in amazement.* MARY *goes to the window and looks out.*

GRANNY—[*Looking up.*] Whut ails you chillun making sech a racket? You ain't qua'lling, is you?

MARY—I'm just trying to get Jim to play a piece on his box. [*To* JIM *in a lower voice.*] Play something for her.

GRANNY—Yeh, play us a piece, Jim, if you'n Mary's finished wid yo' corkusing.

JIM—[*Morosely.*] I cain't play nothing.

GRANNY—Whut you say, Jim?

JIM—[*Shaking his head mournfully and strumming the strings.*] I'll play you sump'n den. [*He plays a few bars and then begins singing, with ohs and ahs thrown in.*]

Oh, whah you gwine, mah loveh?
Gwine on down de road.
Whut make you pale and weeping?
I's carrying a heavy load.

She th'owed her arms around me,
And cast me silveh and gold,
Sing, whah you gwine, mah loveh?
I's a-gwine on down de road.

[MARY *comes back to her chair and sits down.* JIM *stops and speaks softly.*] Mary, why you want to cry lak dat?

She makes no reply.

GRANNY—Whut de matteh wid you, Mary? You's same lak somebody whut's seed de dead.

MARY—[*To* JIM.] Play her burying piece.

GRANNY—Yeh, yeh, play dat. [JIM *fits his pocket-*

knife between his fingers in imitation of the Hawaiians, clears his throat, and strikes another chord.]

Hearse done carried somebody to de graveyard.
Lawd, I know mah time ain't long.
Mary come a-weeping, Martha wailing.
Lawd, I know mah time ain't long.

[*He sings louder, syncopating with his feet.*]

Preacher keep a-preaching, people keep a-dying.
Lawd, I know mah time ain't long.

[GRANNY *begins swaying with the music, clapping her hands, and now and then crying out, "Jesus, Lawdy mah Lawd!" She and* JIM *start singing alternately, he the verses and she the refrain.* MARY *takes off her ribbon and throws it on the bureau.*]

Hammer keep a-ringing on somebody's coffin.

GRANNY—
Lawd, I know mah time ain't long.

JIM—
Gwine a-roll 'em up lak leaves in de judgment.

GRANNY—
Lawd, I know mah time ain't long.

MARY—[*Turning quickly from the window.*] Yes, yes, roll 'em up like leaves in the judgment! [*Bitterly.*] That's the time it's all made right, they say!

[*With sharp insistence she sings, with unhappy mockery.*]

Yea, yea, gwine a-roll 'em up lak leaves in de judgment.

JIM—[*Stopping his music before her shrill voice.*] I dunno ezzactly whut you driving at.

MARY—They ain't no need of you knowing.

GRANNY *goes on swaying and singing a moment.*

GRANNY—Le's don' stop de music, Jim. [*To* MARY.] Jine in wid us and le's make 'er roll.

There is a sudden banging on the door. MARY *hesitates a moment, and then opens it. A look of fear spreads over her face as* HENRY MORGAN *enters. He is a heavily built man, about fifty years old. A week's growth of grizzled beard darkens his face. He wears a slouch hat, long black shabby overcoat buttoned up to his chin, big black boots, and yarn mittens. He carries a package which he throws contemptuously on the bed. He keeps his hat on.* MARY *closes the door and stands with her back to it.* GRANNY *and* JIM *offer their seats.* JIM'S *look is one of servile respect,* GRANNY'S *one of trouble.*

MORGAN—[*In a booming voice.*] Dad burn you, Jim! Still a-courting, eh? Set down, Granny, I ain't going to stay long.

GRANNY—[*Querulously.*] Whut does he say?

MARY—[*Leaving the door and standing by her chair, as she eyes the package.*] He says for you to set down. He ain't going to stay long.

GRANNY—[*Sitting down.*] Ah-hah. . . . Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy!

MORGAN—How you getting on now, Granny?

GRANNY—Po'ly, po'ly, Mr. Mawgin. Ain't gut much longer down hyuh, ain't much longer.

MORGAN—[*Laughing.*] Aw, come on, come on, cut out your fooling. You ain't half as bad off as you make out.

JIM *moves his chair into the corner and sits down.*

MARY—[*Hotly.*] She is sick too, she's bad off. [*She twists her apron nervously.*]

MORGAN—[*With a touch of anger.*] 'Y God, I ain't talking to you right now, Mary.

GRANNY—[*Whining.*] Mr. Mawgin, I sho' is in a bad condition. I hopes you'll neveh have to suffeh lak me.

MORGAN—Well, I may though. I'll send you some more medicine in a day or two.

GRANNY—Thanky, thanky, Mr. Mawgin.

MORGAN—Never mind the thanks. [*Turning to* MARY.] Have you told her everything?

MARY—Not just yet. Somehow I couldn't just to-night.

MORGAN—Unh-hunh, I knowed it. I knowed I'd better come down and make sure. Durn me, you been crying, ain't you? [*Less brusquely.*] What you crying over?

MARY—Nothing as I know of. I was just feeling bad or something.

MORGAN—[*Grimly.*] Well, my young lady, you needn't be crying over what I told you to-day.

GRANNY—What does he say?

MORGAN—Keep quiet, cain't you? I'm talking to Mary.

GRANNY—Is it 'bout de package you brought? Is dat bundle foh me or her?

MORGAN—It's hers. Coming down here, I caught up with Zeke. Said he had a Christmas present for Mary. I took and brought it. Wonder what that nigger's giving her. [MARY *starts towards the bed. He clutches her arm.*] No, you ain't going to see it now, gal. We got a little business to 'tend to first. [GRANNY *begins staring at the bundle on the bed, now and then glancing around to see if any one is watching her. She pays no attention to the conver-*

sation. MARY *stands with head bowed.*] Well, what you going to do about it?

MARY—[*Stammering.*] I—I can't talk about it no more, Mr. Morgan.

MORGAN—Keep your mouth shet then, and I'll do what I said. That's all there is to it. [*He turns to* JIM, *who straightens up.*] Jim, I've done my best to make a match for you and get things straightened out. [*To* MARY.] Either marry him or take your duds and grandmuh and git from here.

GRANNY *steals across the room and picks up the package.*

MARY—Oh, I dunno—I dunno—Mr. Morgan, she couldn't stand tc leave here and you know it.

MORGAN—[*Angrily.*] What'n the name o' God do you want me to do—lose money on you till the end of time? You ain't earned enough to keep you in clothes the last three years since Granny got down——

GRANNY—[*Crying out in a loud voice.*] Lawd in heaben ha' muhcy on us!

She stands by the bed holding a white dress up before her. MORGAN *looks up in perplexity. She throws the dress on the bed and stares at* MORGAN.

MARY—[*Running to the bed.*] It's for me! It's mine!

GRANNY—Mr. Mawgin, Mr. Mawgin, you knows whut dat dress means!

She sits down, rocking and mumbling.

MARY—He sent it to me! He sent it to me! I knowed he wouldn't forget.

MORGAN—[*Quickly.*] Who sent it to you?

MARY—He did.

MORGAN—Who?

MARY—It was him and I don't care if you do know it.

MORGAN—[*Striding up to her and clutching her arm.*] Him who? Who'n the devil you mean?

MARY—Your own boy, that's who. He give it to me.

MORGAN—God A'mighty, that's a lie! [MARY *goes to the mirror and holds the dress up in front of her.*] It's a lie, I tell you. Zeke sent you that dress.

MARY—Mr. Hugh done it. He said he's going to remember me and give me something purty. And I knowed he would. After all I ain't been working

all the whole year for nothing. He's got a heart in him if nobody else ain't.

MORGAN—[*Almost shouting.*] Tell me, gal, what's the meaning of this!

GRANNY—[*Quavering.*] You knows whut it all means, Mr. Mawgin, you knows.

She groans and shakes her head.

MORGAN—[*Loudly.*] Shet up, Granny! Mary, Mary, you put up that damned dress. Put it up, I say! [*She shrinks back from him, and he snatches the dress from her and throws it on the bed. Then he pushes her out into the room.*] You listen to me now. We're going to settle it once and for all right now. Are you going to marry Jim?

MARY—Mr. Morgan, please—I cain't marry him. I'll work and hoe and wash day and night. I'll do anything.

MORGAN—Yes, you will! You've told me that time and again. You got to say one or t'other right here and now. Marry Jim, and everything will be all right. He'll take care of you.

MARY—I cain't do it, I tell you. I'd rather die. Look at him, he's black, and I hate him. I'll never marry no nigger.

MORGAN—Black or white, that's got nothing to do with it.

MARY—I hate the ground he walks on.

MORGAN—[*Turning.*] Granny——

MARY—Don't worry her, don't tell her. I ain't going to see her drove out in the cold like a dog. [GRANNY *sits rocking and gazing into the fire.* JIM, *lost in amazement, fingers his guitar.*] Oh, what's the matter with you!

MORGAN—Gal, I don't want to be too hard on you. But use common sense. They ain't a man in this country would have been as good to you all these years.

MARY—He wouldn't let you treat me so hard if he was here. And he said he wouldn't let you run us off.

MORGAN—Who you talking about this time?

MARY—Mr. Hugh's got feelings, he has.

MORGAN—Damn Mr. Hugh! Don't you mention his name again. Thank God he's not here and won't be.

MARY—He said he'd see that we was took care of.

MORGAN—The fool, he's got no more sense! But he's gone with a crowd of young folks to Charlotte,

and when he gets back there won't be no helping you. I'll see to that.

MARY—He said—he said he'd see me to-morrow and fix it all.

MORGAN—Well, he won't. And ain't you got no shame about you, using my boy's name like a common nigger? What's he to you? [*Pleadingly.*] Ain't you got no sense, Mary? Listen. I'm going to talk plain. Are you planning to ruin his life? You know what I mean too, don't you?

MARY—[*Sobbing.*] They ain't no use trying to change it. [*Starting back.*] But I won't do it. I won't be drove into it. Let us starve or freeze, I don't care what.

MORGAN—All right, is that your last word?

MARY—It is that. Beat me black and blue, I won't listen to you.

MORGAN—[*Turning to the old woman.*] Granny, I got bad news for you. [*She makes no sign that she has heard.*] Mary ain't got no more sense than she was born with, and you might as well get your fixings together and search another place.

GRANNY—[*Without looking around.*] Mr. Mawgin, it don' matteh whut you do to me now. You's done hurt me all you kin. Putt me out and lemme die quick as I kin.

MORGAN—[*Turning to* MARY.] Are you going to see her suffer for your craziness?

MARY—Yes, make me marry him then. They ain't nothing to be done about it. I thought it might be changed, but it won't. I'll marry him and raise more children to go through it all like me. No, no, they ain't no help nowhere.

She sits dejectedly down in her chair.

MORGAN—[*Silent a moment and then speaking more kindly.*] All right, Mary. That's sensible. I'll send for the license and preacher in the morning and have him marry you and Jim right here. Does that suit you, Jim?

JIM—[*Uncertainly.*] Yessuh, yessuh, Mr. Mawgin.

MORGAN—[*Going up to* GRANNY.] Well, Granny, things is going to be all right, after all. Mary and Jim's going to tie up. Don't worry no more. [*She makes no answer.* MORGAN *offers* MARY *his hand, but she keeps her head muffled in her apron.*] Mary, I hated to push you along so, but it's all for the best. [*Embarrassed.*] I could mebbe tell you something that'd make you understand what I mean—but—well, I cain't now.

He stands a moment looking at the floor, then goes out quietly. Presently JIM *rises and lays more wood on the fire. He comes to* MARY.

JIM—Mary, honey, don' take on so. [*He waits patiently, but she says nothing. He strums his guitar and breaks into a mournful song.*]

Lying in de jail-house,
Peeping th'ough de bars,
De cold rain a-falling,
And—de——

Oh, don't worry no mo', Mary, please'm.

MARY—Leave me alone. I ain't going to have nothing to do with you. I promised, but I done took it back. [*Starting up.*] And I'll run catch Mr. Morgan and tell him so. [*She moves towards the door.*] I won't marry no Jim Matthews.

GRANNY—[*Calling loudly.*] Hyuh, hyuh, chile! Don' you go out dat do'! Take dis hyuh key and bring me dat li'l' black box. [MARY *stops.*] Bring me dat box, I say! [*Her threatening voice quavers high.* MARY *comes slowly back, gets the key, and brings the box from the chest and stands wiping the tears from her eyes.*] I's gwine tell you de secret o' dis li'l' box. Yo' mammy said tell you if de time eveh come, and it's come. And when I tells you, you'll see why you got to marry Jim. She went th'ough sin and trouble, and I's gwine save you. [GRANNY *opens the box and pulls out a wrinkled white dress, of a generation ago, yellowed with age.* JIM *looks on with open mouth.*] Listen hyuh, po'

baby, I's gwine tell you now. Nineteen yeah's ago come dis Christmus dey was a white man gi'n yo' mammy dis heah dress, and dat white man is clost kin to you, and he don' live fur off nuther. Gimme dat udder dress dere on de bed. [MARY *gets it and holds it tightly to her.* GRANNY *snatches at it.*] Gimme dat dress, I tells you.

MARY—It's mine and I'm going to keep it.

GRANNY—[*Glaring at her.*] Gimme. [*She jerks the dress from* MARY. *Hobbling to the fireplace, she lays both of them carefully on the fire.* JIM *makes a movement to save them, but she waves him back with her stick.*] Git back, niggeh, git back! Dis night I's gwine wipe out some o' de traces o' sin. [MARY *sits sobbing. As the dresses burn* GRANNY *comes over and stands looking down at her.*] And when dey comes to-morrow wid de license, you go on and marry, and you'll live 'spectable. [*She lays her hand on her head.*] I knows yo' feelings, chile, but you's gut to smother 'em in, you's gut to smother 'em in.

THE HOT IRON

"Dust and ashes fly over my grave . . ."
—Negro song.

CHARACTERS

TILSY MCNEILL—*a washer-woman and farm-hand.*

SINA
CHARLIE } *her children.*
BABE

WILL MCNEILL—*her husband.*

TIME—*the present.*
PLACE—*Tilsy's home in eastern North Carolina.*

TILSY MCNEILL, *a thin hollow-eyed Negro woman of thirty years or more, is in her cabin ironing clothes on a board, one end of which rests on a small table in the center of the room and the other on a chair. She is dipping snuff as she works, now and then spitting into the fire. Hanging on a chair before the fireplace are several garments she has just ironed. A pile of rough-dried clothes is on the bed at the left. She hurries to and fro, as if trying to finish quickly the task before her. And more than once she stops her work and twists her head and shoulders as if trying to ease a dull pain gnawing at her neck.*

Suddenly, with the weight of her pressure upon the iron, the chair topples over, and clothes and all fall to the floor. She clutches at the iron and draws her hand away with an exclamation of pain. Setting the iron to the fire, she runs to a pan of water on the table and souses her hand in, and stands shuddering and wiping her streaming face with her apron. CHARLIE *comes in at the left rear, carrying a hoe in his hand. He is a little, black, barefoot boy of ten.*

CHARLIE—Muh, Mr. Johnson—— [*He sees his mother with her hand to her face.*] Whut's de matter? Yo' toofache worse?

TILSY—[*Whirling at him.*] Look at you a-bringing a hoe in dis house, and bad luck wid it! [*He throws the hoe out behind him.*] Bring me dat soda box in de kitchen. [*She groans.*] Quick, I tells you! I done burnt my hand to de bone. [*He runs into the kitchen and reappears with the soda. She dries her hand, spreads the soda on it, and wraps it up in a rag which she gets from the bureau drawer, talking at him as she does so.*] Why you coming to de house dis time o' day, and de sun two hours high? You gather up dat hoe and git right back to dat cotton patch. Fade from heah or I'll tan yo' hide wid a stick.

CHARLIE—[*Timidly.*] Mr. Johnson run us out'n de cotton field.

TILSY—[*Starting wrathfully towards him.*] He did! And you a-slubbering yo' work! I told you, I told you and Sina to chop yo' rows clean.

He backs away from her wrath.

CHARLIE—Muh, he said—he said you'd oughta keep wid us when we chops.

TILSY—He did! Well, how in the name o' God does he 'spect me to git Mis' Johnson's washing and arning done den? Did he pay you foh whut you chopped?

She hurries back to her ironing.

CHARLIE—No'm, de des' gut a switch and driv us off.

TILSY—[*Raising the iron in her hand.*] Treating you lak dat! I wish to Jesus I could scrush his haid in wid dis heah arn. [*She falls feverishly to work.*] Whah's Sina?

CHARLIE—[*Edging towards the bureau.*] She's coming 'long behime dragging Babe.

TILSY *hangs up a shirt and goes on ironing another.* CHARLIE *watches her and stealthily opens the bureau drawer.*

TILSY—You step to de woodpile and git me dat bucket o' chips. [*She catches sight of his hand in the drawer.*] Heah me? Whut you doing?

CHARLIE—Nothing.

TILSY—Yeh, you is. I know, you's adder dem dere fishing hooks I hid.

CHARLIE—I des wanted to look at 'em a speck.

TILSY—A speck! Let you git yo' fingers on 'em, and in a jook of a sheep's tail you'd be in de creek fishing. Fetch dem chips.

As she moves towards him, he backs out through the door. She begins folding up the dry ironed clothes and putting them in a bag. CHARLIE *comes back with the chips and lays them on the fire.*

CHARLIE—[*After a moment.*] Muh, I could ketch some cats if you'd lemme go to de creek.

TILSY—Listen to me, you ain't gwine down to no creek and drownd yo'se'f, you heah? I wants you to take dis bag o' clo'es and run up to Mis' Johnson's and tell her I'll have de others done some time to-night.

CHARLIE—I—I don' want to go up dere. Mr. Johnson cussed at me while ago.

TILSY—Cain't he'p it. We gut to have some grub to last over Sunday. And you tell her to pay you foh dat cotton chopping. Dey promised you a quarter apiece. And wid fifty cents you kin run over to Buie's Creek and git some Baltimo' meat at Mr. Haire's sto'. [*A loud squalling sets up in the kitchen.*] Lawd, sump'n's happened to Babe. Run see whut's de matter. [CHARLIE *starts out at the rear, but the door opens, and* BABE, *a little chocolate-colored creature of three or four years, yelling loudly, pushes her way in.* SINA, *black and about nine, with bare legs as thin as sticks, wearing a slip of a dirty dress, follows her.*] Whut ails dat baby, Sina?

BABE *claws at her mother's dress, and* TILSY *lifts her in her arms.*

SINA—She—she hurt her nose.

TILSY—Po' thing, you's hurt yo'se'f. [*Sternly to* SINA.] Sina McNeill, I done told you 'bout taking

keer o' dis chile. [*Setting the baby down.*] And I's gwine whup you. Now you des tell me whut you done to her.

SINA—I ain't done nothing, Muh.

TILSY—Hain't done nothing! No, you hain't. Fust, you and Charlie chops yo' cotton so sorry you gits run out'n de field, and we needing every cent we kin git our hands on. Den next you comes walking in so high and mighty bringing Babe wid her haid 'bout busted open.

She picks the child up again and wipes her nose. At the same time she puts her hand to her jaw with a grimace of pain. As she quiets BABE, *she makes a sound of sucking her teeth.*

SINA—I—I was trying to git her some bread from de cupboard, and I couldn't find none. And she kept a-whining and saying dey was some in dere. Den she fou't me off and clamb up to see foh herse'f, and she fell and hurt her nose.

TILSY—De po' thing's hongry ag'in. [BABE *begins to cry softly against her mother's breast.*] But dey's a piece o' bread at de back o' de cook-table. Bring her dat. [*Bitterly.*] I don' reckon de flies has worked it to de'f. [SINA *goes out and brings the bread.* TILSY *sets* BABE *on a chair, and she begins eating greedily. Then she hurries back to her work.*]

Lawd he'p me, I'll never finish dis arning to-day. And Mis' Johnson's des' bound to have it to-morrow.

SINA—[*Tremulously.*] Cain't I—cain't I he'p you do sump'n, Muh?

TILSY *looks at her sharply and turns away her head and irons in silence.* CHARLIE *stands at the rear, looking around and scratching his leg with his toe. Suddenly* TILSY *sits down and stuffs her apron to her face, her body heaving with sobs.* SINA *and* CHARLIE *look at each other miserably.*

CHARLIE—Muh, I's gwine take de clo'es up dere right now.

A sob breaks from her.

SINA—[*Softly to* CHARLIE.] Whut make her cry?

CHARLIE—[*Wretchedly.*] I dunno, 'lessn it's her teef.

At the sound of TILSY'S *sobs* BABE *begins to cry again.* SINA *goes up to her mother.*

SINA—Muh, you want me to wrop up a arn and putt to yo' haid?

TILSY *reaches out convulsively and draws* SINA *to her. Tears begin to pour from* SINA'S *eyes, and her lips crinkle into a cry.*

TILSY—[*Raising her head and drying her eyes.*] Come heah, Babe, to yo' muh. [BABE *rushes into her arms, and* TILSY *rocks to and fro, holding her to her bosom. She starts singing, and Babe grows quiet.*]

I walk in de morning, walk in de evening—
O baby, don'a you cry.
Work and pray and work and pray,
Wid Jesus by and by.
Lemme lay my body down, lemme lay my body down—
O baby, don'a you cry.

[*She bends and kisses* BABE. SINA *clings to her in tears.*]

Wid trial and trouble, trial and trouble—
O baby, husha yo' cry—

She stops and looks at them with shining eyes.

CHARLIE—[*Gulping.*] Muh, cain't I he'p you none?

SINA—[*Wiping her eyes with* TILSY'S *dress.*] You want me to arn and let you rest?

TILSY—Dat's all right. You's too good to me, bofe of you. And don' you feel bad 'bout me talking rough to you. I don' mean to be bad to you lak dat. But my haid's been des' 'bout to kill me, and I gut so tired. [*Putting* BABE *down and standing up.*] Now run on and fo'git I's been mean to you. [*She*

smiles.] We'll make it somehow. Things cain't go on ag'in' us fohever.

CHARLIE—[*Brightly.*] I'll take de clo'es now, Muh, if you wants me to.

TILSY—[*Back at the ironing.*] All right, honey. And if Mis' Johnson ain't gut de money handy, ax her to let you have a liddle side foh de chopping. And tell her I'll fetch all de wash 'bout dark.

CHARLIE—[*Picking up the clothes-bag.*] All right'm. [*He goes out at the left.*]

TILSY—And, Sina, you git de gallon bucket an' run to Mr. Green's and ax him to let us have 'nough meal foh to-night and to-morrow. I owes him foh a peck already, but I knows he'll he'p us out ag'in. Tell him I'll pay him next week somehow. [SINA *gets the bucket.*] Take Babe along wid you and pick you some flowers if you finds any. Dem in de vase is done daid.

SINA—Muh, you won't cry no mo', will you? Me'n Charlie'll git some money to he'p you yit.

TILSY—[*Kissing her on the forehead.*] You's smart as a bee, honey. And whut'd I do widout you to stick by me. Go ahead now, and git back purty quick.

SINA—[*Going out, holding* BABE *by the hand.*] Yeb'm. Come on, Babe, we's gwine git some flowers and see de birds hopping by.

TILSY *watches them go with tears in her eyes.*

TILSY—[*Bowing her head.*] Lawd, Lawd, stay wid me'n my chillun.

She irons away in silence, now and then sucking her teeth. Suddenly CHARLIE *bursts in with a scamper of feet. He is panting, and his eyes are wide with fright.*

CHARLIE—Muh, Muh!

TILSY—[*Starting back.*] Whut's all de rucas 'bout? You looks lak you's seed Ol' Scratch.

CHARLIE—Muh, Muh, Pap's coming down de road.

TILSY—[*In a scared voice.*] Yo' Pap?

CHARLIE—I seed him a-coming, and I run back to tell you. [*Running up to her and catching at her dress.*] He'll hurt you. I knows he will.

TILSY—Now, now, he won't nuther.

CHARLIE—[*Going to the door and peeping out.*] Yonder he comes straight on, kicking de dirt befo' him.

TILSY—Charlie, you go on 'cross de field to Mis' Johnson's and carry dem clo'es. Mebbe yo' Pap wants a word wid me. [*Nervously.*] Hurry up.

CHARLIE—I's—I's afeared to leave you.

TILSY—[*Firmly.*] You go on, honey. He ain't gwine hurt yo' mammy.

He takes up the bag and goes out through the kitchen. TILSY *looks around the room as if searching for some weapon of protection. A heavy step sounds on the porch outside. She irons faster.* WILL MCNEILL, *a black heavy-set negro of forty, comes just inside the door and stares at* TILSY. *His clothes are shabby and dust-stained.* TILSY *shrinks back towards the fire as he enters.*

WILL—[*In a deep growl.*] Well, how's my li'l' gal come on? [*He comes farther into the room.*] Don' be skeered, I ain't gwine hurt you.

TILSY—[*With a slight tremor in her voice.*] We's gitting 'long all right, I reckon.

WILL—[*Laughing.*] Is? Dat's fine. Better'n I is. Des' de same, you don' look like you's flourishing much. [*Gazing at the walls and furnishings.* TILSY *makes no reply. He opens the door to the kitchen and looks in.*] Hunh! don' look lak no millionah's pantry in heah eiver. Whah's yo' stove you had in dere las' yeah?

TILSY—I—I gut rid of it.

WILL—I reckon I sees dat you has.

TILSY—I had to pay Babe's doctor's bill wid it.

WILL—Babe been sick?

TILSY—[*Timidly.*] Whut you keer 'bout Babe, well or sick?

WILL—Look heah, none o' yo' sass.

TILSY—[*Lowering her eyes before his gaze.*] She was sick most o' de winter, and I didn't have no money to pay Doctor Haywood, and he said he'd take de stove foh payment.

WILL—Dat damn nigger do dat! He ain't no doctor. He's des' a humbug, wid his worm grease and snake fat and sulphur-burning.

TILSY—He ain't no humbug, 'ca'se he cyored Babe.

WILL—Co'se he cyored her. She'd a-gut well anyhow. And he tuk de stove and lef' you to cook in dat li'l' ol' farplace, de son of a bitch! [TILSY *trembles but says nothing.*] Listen to me, 'oman, you's fo'got I he'ped pay foh dat stove, ain't you?

TILSY—Yeh, you paid five dollars and I paid fifteen.

WILL—And I's gwine have my five dollars back. You cough up dat dough hot damn quick.

TILSY—[*With a sudden shrill and reckless laugh.*]

Five dollars! I ain't seed dat much money in six months. I ain't and dat's de God's truf.

WILL—Well, you better see it 'fo' dc next six months come by, is all I kin say. [*He suddenly changes his voice to a gentler tone.*] Now look heah, gal, le's fo'git de stove foh de present. How 'bout a liddle grub? I ain't et no dinner.

TILSY—I ain't nuther.

WILL—You ain't?

TILSY—Whut you 'spect me to eat—far coals and ashes?

WILL—You must be gitting low sho' 'nough. [*Eyeing her.*]

TILSY—I ain't had nothing but a cup o' coffee dis whole day. De chillun didn't have 'nough to eat foh dinner even.

WILL—[*Taking a seat.*] Whut you gwine do foh supper?

TILSY—[*Still ironing nervously.*] I sent off adder some meal and meat.

WILL—Why you keep sucking yo' teef?

TILSY—[*Leaning over the board and speaking jerkily.*] I gut a rising in my jaw. [*Suddenly crying out and beating her temples with her fists.*] My

haid's busting open. I ain't slept none foh two nights. And if you don't hush, I cain't stand it. [*She turns the garment and irons faster.*]

WILL—Dat's bad. [*Snapping out.*] Say, you ain't playing no tricks on me 'bout being sick, is you? [*She makes no answer, only rocking her head from side to side in pain.*] No, I reckons you is r'ally sick. But I'd sorter looked forward to spending de night wid you.

TILSY—[*Staring at him with wide eyes.*] I know whut you wanted. But you kin traipse right back over de river to yo' huzzy over dere if you wants somebody to sleep wid.

WILL—Well, I's gwine stay heah to-night des' de same.

TILSY—If you does, me'n my chillun'll sleep in de fields.

WILL—[*Lighting his pipe.*] Suits me. But anyhow I's usually had my way when I stopped by heah in de past. Mebbe I'll have it to-night.

TILSY—[*In a hard voice.*] Befo' you lays hands on me dis night, I'll stick my butcher-knife in you to de hollow.

WILL—[*Blinking at her.*] 'Y God, you gits riled easy!

TILSY—[*Stammering.*] R—i-led easy! Will McNeill, I want you to git out'n my house and go back to yo' old bitch and her passel o' puppies.

WILL—[*Starting half out of his chair.*] Damn you, cut out dat talk.

TILSY—Oh, no, you cain't skeer me. I ain't de woman you married dem twelve yeah ago no longer. And I ain't de woman you been coming back to see whenever you felt de sap rising in you. I's changed, and I hates you worse'n a snake in de grass.

WILL—[*Sitting back and smiling.*] Hunh, I's heered dat spiel befo'.

TILSY—[*Her voice cracking.*] Yeh, yeh, you has. But I ain't never said it befo' lak dat—lak I says it now. I knows whut you's come back foh. You wants to leave anudder baby sprouting in me, anudder baby to feed and tend to and feel, fumble and pull and cry th'ough de long nights while you lies rotten wid sin and udder women. [*Pointing to the rear door.*] If you'll des' go out th'ough dat do' to de forked peach tree back o' de house and dig down two feet in de ground, you'll find in a shoe-box what you lef' wid me de last time. It was bawn daid, and it ain't gwine happen ag'in, [*Her voice rising high.*] never, so he'p me God!

WILL—[*Stirring uneasily in his chair.*] Well, you has had it sorter hard, mebbe.

TILSY—[*Setting down her iron and holding her jaw in her hand.*] Hard! You's killed all de heart I had in me, and me'n my chillun don' know yo' name no mo'. [*Moving towards him.*] And I wants you to git off'n dis place. [*Crying out.*] Git out'n my house! Git! [*He springs up and holds his chair between them.*] Is you gwine?

WILL—[*Laughing.*] You ain't gwine run me off dat easy. I's invited myse'f to supper, and I's gwine stay.

He watches her closely.

TILSY—[*With tight lips.*] I gives you des one minute to hit de grit.

WILL—You better watch dem dere clo'es, somebody's dress is burning up. [TILSY *turns and snatches the iron from the burning cloth and holds up a lacy dress with a great hole burned in it. She stares at it dumbly a moment, then sits down suddenly with her hands clawing each other and her lips mumbling incoherently.* CHARLIE *sticks his head in at the left and stands watching* WILL. WILL *sees him.*] Is dat you, Charlie? [CHARLIE *says nothing.*] Don't be so skittish; I ain't wanting to tech you. [CHARLIE *lays his package of meat on the bureau.*] Yo' muh's having des' a li'l' sick

spell wid her haid. She'll be all right in a minute. [CHARLIE *softly opens the bureau drawer.* WILL *calls out suspiciously.*] Heah, boy, you ain't feeling foh a gun or sump'n, is you?

CHARLIE—[*Softly, as he takes out a long fishing hook.*] I's des' gwine git out my hooks.

WILL—[*Coming up to him.*] I dunno. [*He looks suspiciously around at* TILSY.] You all mebbe's up to devilment. [*As* WILL *comes towards him,* CHARLIE *runs to the rear door.* WILL *grabs him by the arm.*] Nunh-unh, my li'l' man, I seed you when you run back down de road and den skeeted 'cross de field. Tell me, did yo' muh send you to git Mr. Johnson to come drive me off?

CHARLIE—[*Struggling and beginning to cry.*] Turn me loose! Muh! Muh!

TILSY—[*Bounding out of her chair.*] Let dat boy alone!

WILL—[*Holding him from the floor by his arm.*] Shet yo' mouf, 'oman. If you all thinks you's driving me off by sending foh he'p, I reckon I'll show you. Speak to me, you li'l' devil, and tell me straight. I's gwine git at de truf. [CHARLIE *suddenly hooks him in the leg.*] God A'mighty, he's stuck me wid dat fish hook!

He drops the boy who darts sobbing under the bed.

With groans and twistings WILL *finally gets the hook out of his flesh. His face is distorted with anger.*

TILSY—[*As* WILL *starts towards the bed.*] Don't you bother my boy! [WILL *gets down on his knees and peers under the bed.* TILSY *screams out again.*] I'll kill you 'fo' you hurts him.

WILL *begins clambering under the bed.* TILSY *picks up a chair and brings it down on his back. He rises from the floor and strikes her with his fist, sending her tottering across the room.*

WILL—[*Panting.*] I—I'll kill dat Charlie if I gits my hands on him!

TILSY *flies at him again. He hurls her against the table and leaves her limp. Then he starts back under the bed. She seizes the iron and springs towards him. He tries to wrest it from her, but as his hand touches it he yells with pain. By this time* CHARLIE *has crawled from beneath the bed at the rear.* TILSY *throws herself at* WILL. *He stumbles backwards over a chair, and she strikes him in the head with the iron. He drops limply on the floor, blood flowing from his face. The hot iron rolls into the pile of clothes that has fallen off the bed in the scuffle, and a curl of smoke soon rises upward.*

TILSY—Will! Will!—Lawd-a-muhcy, I've killed him!

She draws away to the rear of the room and sits dazedly on the bed. CHARLIE *runs to her and clings to her dress, whimpering in fear.* SINA *and* BABE *come in at the left.*

SINA—Muh, we gut some meal. And look at de flowers Babe picked. [BABE *holds up the flowers.* SINA *screams.*] Whut's de matter wid dat man on de flo'? Lawd, it's Pap!

She and BABE *both run crying to* TILSY.

TILSY—[*Hugging* BABE *to her, and rocking to and fro.*] We gut to git he'p!

She backs out at the rear, carrying BABE *in her arms, with* CHARLIE *and* SINA *holding to her dress. They are heard sobbing wildly as they leave the house and go into the fields.*

THE PRAYER-MEETING

"I lie in de grave and stretch out my arms,
And I lay dis body down. . . ."

—Negro song.

CHARACTERS

GRANDMUH BOLING—*an old Negro woman.*

LORINA
ILA
ANGIE
} *her grandchildren.*

DOUGLASS MCCRANIE—*a young sport.*

JOE DAY—*a preacher among the Negroes.*

UNCLE JED—*the leader of the music.*

AUNT BELLA—*his wife.*

MAISIE
PETE
MAMIE
ARTHUR
} *neighbors attending the prayer-meeting.*

TIME—*A few years ago.*

PLACE—*The Boling home in eastern North Carolina.*

ON *an early summer evening* LORINA *and* ILA BOLING, *two young Negro girls, are putting the finishing touches to their toilette.* LORINA *is dressed in a dark-colored georgette waist and dark skirt, tolerably decent shoes and white stockings.* ILA, *whose dress is similar except for a pink waist, is sitting on the bed lacing her shoes. Raising her head, she sits staring before her for a moment. She is stouter than* LORINA, *her face less intelligent, but more honest.*

LORINA—[*Impatiently.*] What'n the name o' God ails you, a-setting there like the dead lice was dropping off'n you! [ILA *makes no answer.*] Don't you know it's about time they was all here?

She takes a can of powder and sprinkles her neck and shoulders and by catching hold of her waist, shakes it down over her body.

ILA—[*Lacing her shoes and speaking in a slow fumbling voice.*] You must got a idee to charm Doug, a-putting all them sweet powders on you.

LORINA—Never you mind. 'Tain't for me to hoe cotton all the week and not make use of Sad'd'y night for a good time when it does come. Yeh, charm Doug or not charm him. [*She begins singing in a high clear voice.*]

O mister engineer,
I'm a-going away from here . . .
Going down to Alabam',
Going to see my man.
And the engineer, he say——

[*She whirls on her toes towards* ILA.] Here, is my placket so it won't show?

ILA—Yeh. You looks all right—and you gits around powerful spry. [*Gloomily.*] How come you can be so prancy-like, and you a-knowing it's lak stirring up Old Scratch—having this here prayer-meeting?

LORINA—[*Ironically.*] Just listen at her!

ILA—She's warned us time and ag'in about it. And when she finds it out this time, you and me's going to be sorry. I wisht I hadn't let you a-drug me into it. [*Bitterly.*] And us supposed to be the high-class of the neighborhood!

She goes over to the dresser and powders her face and begins arranging her hair.

LORINA—Sorry? I'd like to know why.

ILA—[*Turning on her quickly.*] You'll know why when it's too late. Let her put her curse on us, and then—— I done told you time and ag'in.

LORINA—[*Polishing her shoes.*] Keep on with your foolish whine and jawing! Who's a-scared o' her and her talk about devils! Not me, you can bet.

ILA—It's all right to brag and be uppity now. But we'll feel differenter if she gets onto it and comes down with one o' her 'ligious spells and ravings.

LORINA—'Twon't matter then. We'll done had our fun—la-la-la!

ILA—But——

LORINA—[*Hotly.*] Shut up your cheeping, won't you? She ain't going to git onto what we're doing. Who's going to tell her, anyhow?

ILA—I know. But we sorter promised to do better. And she's s'picioning us a-making free with the men. I dunno . . . I don't lak to hurt her no more . . . her with her proud white folks' notions 'bout 'spectability, and she gitting old and childish now.

LORINA—[*Angrily.*] You allus starting up that bull. Folks'd think you and Brother Joe Day hadn't never been cohorting with each other. And if he is a preacher plenty of 'em knows how he is with the women.

ILA—Well, what's he to Doug McCranie and his car and liquor? [LORINA *grins and goes to the mirror.*] He's the worst nigger in the country, and she hates him worse'n a coach-whup.

LORINA—No matter. She ain't got no call to be looking down on him 'cause he's a fast nigger.

Things is changed. Young folks is going to have pleasure this day and time.

ILA—Mebbe some don't git as much pleasure out'n it as you mought think.

LORINA—[*Looking at her keenly and shrugging her shoulders.*] Huh! The next thing I know you'll be a-moaning Jesus . . . though how you could do it now, I don't know.

ILA—[*Soberly.*] I reckon it'll never happen at none o' our prayer-meetings.

LORINA—You'll be getting like Gran'muh—traipsing after the white folks' ways. I wish she'd leave us and stay up to Mr. Archie's the rest of her life, let alone this week.

ILA—So you and me could carry on like we please, uh?

LORINA—She waits on them gods of the earth up there same as if she was still a slave. And what thanks does she get?—They allus looking down on you.

ILA—She won't leave us though, long as Angie hangs 'bout here.

LORINA—[*After a moment.*] Where is he?

ILA—[*Absently rubbing her face.*] Who?

LORINA—Who! Angie, of course. Is your brains moldy?

ILA—I dunno where he is. 'Bout two hours ago he put on his clean clothes and went down the road—said he'd be back after while.

LORINA—Apt as not into some devilment. [*Looking at the alarm clock on the dresser.*] Time them folks was coming. We'd better straighten up a little. I'll put a light in the hall.

She winds the graphophone and sets it playing "The Preacher and the Bear." Then she lights a lamp and takes it into the hall. ILA *picks up their dirty clothes and puts them in the chest and pushes their working shoes under the bed.* LORINA *returns with two or three sprays of flowers. She begins dressing up a vase on the center-table.*

LORINA—Thought I'd crop a few o' these to add a little life to the room.

ILA—[*Stopping the graphophone.*] You better let Gran'muh's burning bush alone. She don't lak to have it broke up.

LORINA—We want to have things looking a little nice for the crowd, don't we? [*There is a noise outside.*] Wait. There's some of them now. I hear a buggy.

She runs and takes a final look in the mirror and goes out through the hall. ILA *hurriedly finishes sweeping and puts the broom in the corner. The door at the left opens and* ANGIE *enters. He stops just inside the door and eyes* ILA *quizzically. He is a slight negro of twenty-one, dressed in a worn blue serge suit, army shoes and khaki shirt, black necktie and gray cap. There is something childish and irresponsible in his dark brown face. He stands unsteadily, now and then moving his feet to keep his balance.*

ILA—[*Suspiciously.*] Where you been, Angie? We thought you was the others. . . . [*She looks at him searchingly. He eyes her blankly.*] What you been doing, Angie? You ain't been messing with . . .

ANGIE—[*Waving his hand with an attempt at dignity, and speaking thickly.*] No, I ain't! No, I ain't. Charlie 'n' me [*He jerks his thumb behind him.*] —we's just going out for a little while—and a tech won't hurt—just a little, you know. [*Blinking his eyes.*]

ILA—Just a little! You're drunk.

ANGIE—[*Cunningly.*] That's all right! That's all right! You dunno—you dunno. [*Looking around the room.*] When's Gran'muh coming home?

LORINA—[*Coming in at the rear and staring at*

him wrathfully.] Not till Monday night. And it's a caution she ain't—for your good. You been drinking again after all your promising. [*Sardonically.*] Poor little Angie! Gran'muh's pet! Cain't he let a Sad'd'y night go by without getting drunk? [*Laughing at him in scorn.*] She'll get onto you—you a-fooling her with smooth talk.

ANGIE—[*Hotly.*] What you mean! You . . . and . . . Ila—you ain't the kin-n-d to go preaching to me—you and Doug McCranie and Joe Day—and you all a-fixing up for dirty doings. I reckon you won't tell on me, and I won't tell on you. [*He laughs unsteadily. A note of tenderness comes into his voice.*] I'm a-going over to the sto-er-e— [*Waving his hand indefinitely in the direction of the road.*] —and git her some snuff. I'm going to git her a whole pound o' Sweet Scotch.

ILA—[*Turning from the dresser and speaking half-pleadingly.*] Angie, you stay away from that there store. You'll git into trouble with them fellows. They's a crowd o' drunks there ever' Sad'd'y night.

ANGIE—[*Pompously.*] Oh, I'm just going over for a little while. And I'll git her a bladder that big.

He measures with his hands. There is a pause, and he shifts his weight from one foot to the other.

LORINA—[*After a moment.*] Well, what you want?

ANGIE—[*Embarrassed.*] Nothing. [*Then quickly as if he has thought of something.*] Yeh, I want to git some change out'n my overalls.

He goes carefully across the room and into the entry.

LORINA—[*Sticking a rose in her hair.*] What a fool he is! He's going to the devil as well as us. But let him go! [*She stands looking in the mirror and singing.*]

> John Henry had a purty little wife,
> The dress she wore was red.
> She got upon the railroad track
> And never did look back,
> Said, "I'm going where my man fell dead—
> Going where my man fell dead——

[*She laughs shrilly.*] Oh, hell, what a song!—Why don't they come on!

She starts the graphophone softly playing "Negro Blues," and sways around the room to the music. ANGIE *comes in with his hand in his coat pocket. He walks stealthily past* ILA *without looking at her.*

ILA—What you up to, Angie? [*She catches him by the coat.*] You go put it back.

ANGIE—[*Jerking away from her.*] Shet your

mouth! Don't a man need a little 'tection on the roads these nights?

An impatient voice calls from the outside.

VOICE—Heigh, Angie! Won't the old woman let you go?

ANGIE—That's Charlie, tired o' waiting for me. Damn him! Calling her the "old woman"!

LORINA—Let him alone, Ila. Let him tote his gun. First thing he knows, he'll land in jail. And what'll she say to him then—him she sets such a store by?

ANGIE—[*Turning to her angrily.*] Yeh, yeh, you two's a sight to be spouting soft Godly talk at me! You—you—— [*He blubbers with anger. Shivering and speaking in a shrill voice, he turns to* ILA.] Gus Turner's a-laying up for me, and I ain't going to be no coward. I got to 'tect myself.

VOICE—[*From the outside.*] Whoa, cain't you! —Angie, if you' a-going, come on!

ANGIE—[*Going out, stops and blinks uncomprehendingly at* LORINA. *He smiles weakly, and then his eyes begin to shine with wrath. He starts towards* LORINA.] I see what you's after. Damn you. Don't you tell her I—I been drinking! [*Quavering.*] You allus trying to git me in bad with her, trying to turn her ag'in' me.

LORINA—[*Disgustedly.*] Aw, go on. I ain't going to say nothing. Keep on with your trifling. She'll be done o' you some o' these days.

ANGIE—[*Grinning and his face clearing.*] I'm a-coming raght back, and a-going to bring her sump'n nice.

LORINA—Go on, I say. Git out'n here. I heard a car cross the creek bridge, and they'll be here in a few minutes.

He stands blinking at her a moment and then lurches out the door. There is a sound of voices outside, two or three blows with a stick, and then the roar of wheels and the galloping of a mule. CHARLIE *and* ANGIE *are heard singing, their voices growing fainter and fainter.*

> Come along, O children, come along!
> While the moon shines bright,
> We'll take a boat and down the river float—
> Gwine raise a rucas to-night.

[*The refrain floats back on the wind.*]

> Gwine raise a rucas to-night—
> Gwine raise a rucas to-night.

ILA—[*Staring before her.*] Poor Angie! What'll become of him?

A whippoorwill begins calling in the hollow back of

the house. A mocking-bird answers with chirps in the trees near the door, and ILA *shivers and looks around the room.*

LORINA—Git up, Ila, and finish fixing yourself. You ain't even shined your shoes. God help me, you're a sight for speed!

ILA—[*Abstractedly.*] Gran'muh says they's signs in whippoorwhills calling close to the house.

LORINA—Christ A'mighty! You're too big a fool to 'sociate with the men. Why ain't they signs in that mocking-bird, then? [*A Ford drives up outside.*] Hurry up. There's some of 'em now. [LORINA *stops the graphophone and goes out into the hall.* ILA *begins brushing her shoes with a dirty rag. Voices are heard in the hall.*] Good-evening, Doug! Good-evening, Brother Day! [*Laughing.*] Here you are with your Bible. And Doug's brought his box.

DOUG—[*In a strong, laughing voice.*] Hello, Reeny. Yeh, we wants a liddle real music dis time. Lord, look at dem flowers! Ain't she a show, Brother Day?

BROTHER DAY—[*In a deep smooth voice.*] Good-evening, Sister Reeny. How does you come on?

ILA *finishes rubbing her shoes and throws the rag under the bed.* BROTHER DAY, DOUG, *and* LORINA *come to the rear door.*

LORINA—Lay your things on the table here in the hall, and then come right in.

DOUG—We's betting on gitting here 'fore dark, but we had a punchter t'other side de creek. [*Coming into the room.*] I swear you all's sot for the meeting—uh? How you, Ila?

He lays his guitar against the table in the left corner.

ILA—I'm middling.

BROTHER DAY *comes in.*

BROTHER DAY—Well, well, how you making out, Ila?

ILA—[*Shaking hands somewhat listlessly.*] All right, I reckon. How you been getting along for the last week or so?

BROTHER DAY—[*Looking at her kindly.*] Fine, fine as can be!

BROTHER DAY *is a heavy-set Negro of thirty or more, dressed in a dark suit, the cut of his coat being long and swallow-tailed. He wears a celluloid collar with no tie, baggy trousers, and shoes that need repairing. His forehead is low, his small eyes deep-set and close together. His whole appearance denotes a pious sensuality and cupidity, a lover of chicken dinners and plump hostesses.*

DOUG *is a tall, lithe young Negro of about twenty,*

black and greasy-looking, with something of the "sport" about him. He wears a light checkered suit, pink socks, tan shoes, a flowing red tie and white collar. A large pink rose is stuck in the lapel of his coat. His hair is cropped close, and his pop-eyes are bold and daring.

DOUG—[*Looking around the room as he smiles and rubs his hands.*] Well, heah we is.

LORINA—Yeh, I thought you'd never be coming.

BROTHER DAY—Why, we's early. Some time 'fore the rest of the crowd'll come.

DOUG—[*Coming over to* LORINA *and laying his arm around her shoulder.*] Was you anxious foh us to git heah, sugar lump?

LORINA—[*Slipping from under his arm, laughing.*] Mebbe so and mebbe not. [*Turning to* BROTHER DAY.] We got some pickles and cake fixed for you all. And I reckon we can eat 'em now before the rest of the folks come. They're for home folks. I'll go git 'em.

DOUG—Yeh, come on, lessus git the grub. [*As they cross the room to the door at the right,* DOUG *puts his arm around* LORINA *and bends over her.*] Uh-huh! honey, you sho' smells lak the breaf of spring.

She slaps him playfully on the cheek. They go out.

BROTHER DAY *comes over and sits on the bed beside* ILA.

BROTHER DAY—[*Catching* ILA *by the chin and turning her face towards him.*] Now look heah, honey, what's the trouble with you? What makes you act so distant? Aw, come on. You ain't even seemed glad to see me.

He tries to draw her to him, but she pushes him back, her face turned away.

ILA—I don't lak for you to do that-a-way.

BROTHER DAY—[*In surprise.*] You don't? What's got into you? Now, honey babe!

He pats her softly on the cheek.

ILA—They ain't nothing got into me 'cepting I'm tired o' all this. I wants to know when we're going to git married.

BROTHER DAY—What's that—married? I—I——

ILA—Yeh, married. I got enough o' these heah carrying-ons. I wants to be 'spectable lak other folks, and you promised me time and ag'in.

BROTHER DAY—[*Slowly.*] Yeh, I knows I promised—leastways we mentioned it some. [*He goes and sits at the table again. After a moment he continues.*] Heah, I tell you, we'll come to some agree-

ment to-night after the meeting. Yeh, we'll fix it. [*Sullenly.*] The old woman's been adder you ag'in, ain't she?

ILA—Never you mind 'bout her. If she did, I reckon she had a right to. [*Earnestly.*] Joe, I'm tired o' this messing around and having folks talking 'bout me. To-day down in the cotton patch some o' the girls mentioned your name, and then all o' them 'gun to look at me and snigger.

BROTHER DAY—[*Angrily.*] They did—hah? Well, never mind 'em. They's the ungodly. We'll fix it to-night, honey, we'll talk it over.

ILA—[*Bowing her head and speaking bitterly.*] Yeh, talk it over! That and you know what is all you ever wants to do.

BROTHER DAY—[*Coming again to the bed and putting his arm around her.*] Talk is right, chile, talk is right. It's a question that needs consideration. [*Gallantly.*] Le's fohgit it right now. Sugar, you sho' looks unctious in all this heah new waist. Everything you wears seems just made foh you.

Gradually she lets her head rest on his shoulder. He strokes her hair gently. LORINA *is heard talking in a high laughing voice in the kitchen.*

LORINA—Wait a while, cain't you? You got to wait.

There is a resounding slap. The door to the right opens, and LORINA *comes tripping in, carrying a jar of pickles and cake on a waiter.* DOUG *follows somewhat sheepishly.* LORINA *sets the waiter on the table.*

BROTHER DAY—She punched you on the jaw, huh? Haw, haw, haw!

He laughs loud and long and slowly takes his arm from around ILA.

DOUG—Put a brake on that laugh, damn you. [*He strides over to* LORINA *and sweeps her from the floor into his arms. Holding her tightly to him, he kisses her several times and then throws her into the rocking-chair beside the table. He smooths his coat and adjusts his tie.*] Now, 'y God, who's been kissed enough foh onct!

LORINA—[*Half angry and yet pleased at his show of strength.*] Doug, you shore are a hog when it comes to some things.

DOUG—[*Cutting himself a piece of cake and taking a pickle.*] I's just a man whut is a man, and it's time you was a-finding it out.

He sits down.

LORINA—[*Springing up.*] Let me pass the eats.

She cuts the cake and passes the food around as the talk goes on.

BROTHER DAY—[*With a mouthful of cake.*] Seems lak you two's got to cutting up right off the bat. We can have our good times on the ride to-night. Doug's going to take us over the river to-night in his cah foh some ice-cream.

LORINA—Ain't that the stuff, though?

ILA—I ain't going with Doug nowhere, and he been drinking—liable to kill somebody.

DOUG—[*Rolling his eyes as he swallows a hunk of cake.*] Well, if you's scared to ride faster'n any storm, you'd better stay out'n my cah to-night, foh I'm going to pour it in her till she's gagged.

BROTHER DAY—Never mind, Ila, he's safe as a cellar. He ain't got enough in him to hurt.

They eat in silence a moment. Finally BROTHER DAY *takes a fork and fishes in the jar for the last pickle.*

LORINA—Are they all gone, Brother Day? Mebbe you'd like some more.

BROTHER DAY—[*Licking his lips.*] Well, they's mighty good. Who made 'em?

ILA—Gran'muh put 'em up. Lak as not we'll git into trouble for eating 'em too.

LORINA—She ain't going to find out what went with 'em.

BROTHER DAY—[*Regretfully.*] I reckon then we'd better not bother no more of 'em. [*With a touch of uneasiness in his voice.*] You sho' she won't come back heah to-night?

LORINA—She's up helping 'em cook over Sunday. What call's she got to be coming back?

DOUG—[*Lighting a cigarette and blowing the smoke through his nostrils in great clouds.*] Who minds de old woman! She ain't right in her head nohow. She don't faze me none when I's out foh a good time.

Sounds of voices and a rattling wagon come from the outside.

LORINA—That's the rest of 'em, I reckon.

BROTHER DAY—Well, they's come quicker'n I thought.

He reaches quickly for the last piece of cake.

LORINA—I'll see 'em in, Ila, and you take out the leavings.

ILA *gathers up the things and takes them to the kitchen.* LORINA *goes out at the rear as the other members of the prayer-meeting shuffle into the hall.*

DOUG—Hurry and git yo' cake swallowed, Brother Day. We wants to slide raght into de music and git th'ough de meeting—and den foh our little ride.

BROTHER DAY—Yeh, yeh, you's talking my way.

A medley of greetings is heard in the hall: "Hello, Reeny." "How you, Uncle Jed?" "Hy, Pete. And here's Aunt Bella. You all lay your capes and things on the table and come right in. We been waiting for you." DOUG *and* BROTHER DAY *get up and shake hands with* UNCLE JED, AUNT BELLA, MAISIE, MAMIE, PETE, *and* ARTHUR *as they come into the room.* ILA *comes back in at the right. A general hand-shaking and howdy-doing goes on.* "Howdy, Brother Day." "Glad to see you, Brother Arthur. And how do our li'l' Sister Maisie git on?" "Heigho, Ila." "All right, how you, Maisie? See you got Pete still a-poling after you." "You sho's fixed up, Reeny." "You needn't say nothing, Pete, look at Maisie with them new slippers." "How goes it, Doug?" "How's de boy, Arth?" "You all git seats and make yourself at home."

They seat themselves here and there about the room, in chairs, on the bed, the chest and in different places. BROTHER DAY *sits near the table.*

BROTHER DAY—[*Looking at* UNCLE JED *who sits near the left front.*] Well, Uncle Jed, seems lak you and Aunt Bella's all the married folks we got with us to-night.

UNCLE JED—[*A dark, wrinkled little man with a mighty voice.*] Sho' is, Brother Day. But some o'

dese heah mought be merried wid no harm done. [MAISIE *snickers audibly.* UNCLE JED *puts on his specs and gazes around the room.*] Yeh, dis is a sweet-hearting crowd aw raght. Look at 'em all a-pairing off—Maisie'n Pete on de bed, and Mamie and Arth on de chist, and Reeny and Doug setting side by side next de graffyfom. [*To* ILA, *who is sitting on the bed.*] Ila, you'd bedder come over heah and set by Brother Day.

ILA—I'm fixed heah.

UNCLE JED—Unh-hunh, suit yo'se'f. And, Bella, you mought as well hitch yo' cheer clost to mine, chile.

AUNT BELLA—[*Settling her two hundred pounds in a chair near the rear door.*] I reckons a liddle distance f'om you'll do me good, seeing as I's allus tied to you.

BROTHER DAY—[*As everybody laughs.*] A good un on you, Uncle Jed.

UNCLE JED—[*Sharply.*] Hah. how 'bout you and Ila?

BROTHER DAY *moves his chair.*

LORINA—Ain't nobody else coming from over in Shaw Town, Mamie?

MAMIE—[*A thin mulatto of twenty.*] I dunno, I think they ain't.

PETE—[*A tall fellow of twenty-five.*] Naw'm, they ain't none of 'em a-coming. Adder we gut the hay-ride all fixed, dey backed down on us. Just us six rid in a big two-hoss wagon. Ain't much of a hay-ride in that.

ARTH—[*Small and black and slow of speech.*] I seed Jeems and Beck and some t'others in Lillington to-day, and they said they couldn't make it out heah to-night.

AUNT BELLA—[*Sniffing.*] Hunh! And I reckons we all knows why too. Ef dey's skeahed o' Gran'-muh Boling's talk, I knows a few whut ain't. How 'bout it, Doug?

DOUG—'Y God, you's spetting a yurful, Aunt Bella.

He lays his arm carelessly around LORINA.

UNCLE JED—Don't de Book say be joyful and sing and enjoy yo'se'f? Sho', ain't it so, Brother Day?

BROTHER DAY—It's set down in black and white, and a running man kin read it.

PETE *lights a cigarette and gives* MAISIE, *his plump, mischievous partner, a puff or two. She leans her head on his shoulder and coughs.*

LORINA—Look at Maisie. She's choked on a little smoke. Gimme a cigarette, Doug, I'll show 'em how to smoke in style.

DOUG—Sho'. Women in de best sassiety smokes now.

He lights a cigarette, gives it one or two draws, kisses her and then sticks it between her lips. She puffs away gayly.

DOUG—Want one, Mamie?

MAMIE—No, I'd git the head-swim.

ARTH—I'll take one, Doug.

DOUG—And I mought as well light up ag'in too.

BROTHER DAY—[*After* DOUG *and* ARTHUR *have settled back smoking.*] Well, brethren and sisters, they ain't but a few of us heah to-night. But we kin have just as good time. Foh it's written, whah two or three is gathered——

DOUG—Dis heah crowd's big enough to natchly raise de roof a foot or two when we gits started, awright.

BROTHER DAY—All o' you knows that we been wanting to have a meeting heah since a few months ago when we had sich a time. And to-night's the fust time we've had the chance. But it seems lak some o' our congregation has got cold feet.

PETE—'Twon't keep the rest of us from r'aring and charging when we gits started.

MAISIE—[*Snuggling up to* PETE.] It sho' God won't.

BROTHER DAY—And we wants to git th'ough a liddle early, foh me'n Doug's made arrangements with Ed Henderson over the river to 'semble there and have ice-cream and soft drinks and sich.

AUNT BELLA—Mought as well go down in yo' pocket, Brother Day, 'caze I's primed to eat a gallon.

MAMIE—And I gut a two month's drought in me.

LORINA—[*Bitingly.*] It's a tapeworm a mile long.

MAMIE—[*Hotly.*] 'Tain't no sich.

UNCLE JED—Heah, heah now!

BROTHER DAY—[*Rising and looking at his hearers.*] All o' you knows that our having fun along with our religion ain't met with favor 'mongst some o' our color and kind. But they's scripture to back us up in the mingling of pleasure and worship. [*Looking around.*] Ain't it so?

UNCLE JED—It's so ef you says so, Brother Day, and it suits your humble servant.

AUNT BELLA—It hain't never gone ag'in' de grain wid me to take pleasure when she comes.

BROTHER DAY—And, brothers and sisters, I don't believe in putting on sackcloth and ashes and living in a vale o' tears.

DOUG—Git to de p'int, we've hearn dat befo'.

BROTHER DAY—And so—and so I thinks we'd better git along with the music. We's already a speck behime time. Later we kin have the 'sperience meeting. So, Brother Jed, you kin take charge.

He sits down. UNCLE JED *rises and stands facing the group. By this time the room has become filled with smoke from the cigarettes, and the dim lamp has grown dimmer. The corners and rear of the room are filled with shadow, and through the murk the faces of the listeners show, eager, vibrating.*

UNCLE JED—[*Rubbing his hands with joyous anticipation.*] Well, whut must we start off wid?

PETE—Le's open up wid a piece f'om Doug and his box.

AUNT BELLA—Yeh, le's do. Dat'll limber us up a speck.

UNCLE JED—Sho'. Best to wade in de shallow water fust. Go ahead, Doug. [*He sits down, and* DOUG *fetches his guitar from the corner and begins tuning it.*] I reckon we mought have de Dinah piece, Doug.

DOUG—Good enough. [*He strums a chord or two and begins singing.*]

Gimme a piece o' corn-bread in my hand.
See Aunt Dinah!
Sop my way to de Promise' Land.
See my Lawd.

[UNCLE JED *joins in, and then several others. Finally all are singing.*]

(*Chorus*)

I'm going away—'way,
See Aunt Dinah.
I'm going away—'way,
See my Lawd.

DOUG *takes the lead. The others come in on the answer and chorus.*

DOUG—

Two liddle boys one Sad'd'y night

OTHERS—

See Aunt Dinah!

DOUG—

Tried to go to heaven on a 'lectric light.

OTHERS—

See my Lawd.

ALL—

I'm going away—'way,
See Aunt Dinah.
I'm going away—'way,
See my Lawd.

[*The singers pound on the floor with their feet and clap their hands. The song continues.*]

The wiah she bust and de liddle boys fell.
See Aunt Dinah.
And now they's baking dey hoofs in hell,
See my Lawd.

(*Chorus*)

My old mistis promised me,
See Aunt Dinah.
When she died going to set me free,
See my Lawd.

(*Chorus*)

She lived so long dat her head gut bald,
See Aunt Dinah.
Gut out'n de notion o' dying a-tall,
See my Lawd.

DOUG *winds up with a display of chords, and the pounding and clapping die out.* UNCLE JED *looks around and grins.*

UNCLE JED—How 'bout dat, Brother Day?

BROTHER DAY—Had the glory in it, sho's you bawn.

UNCLE JED—[*Rising to his feet.*] Now, folkses, we wants to bear raght down on dis heah next song. Pete, you and Arth open up dem dere bottom stops.

Le's heah de notes growling down under yo belly-band. And, Sister Ila, I wants to heah yo' alto sounding out to de lam' o' God dat taketh away de sins o' de world. You didn't putt no heart in dat dere song. Whut ails you?

ILA—[*Morosely.*] Never you mind, I'll sing.

UNCLE JED—Bully den! Evehbody spet on dey hands and git ready to go to it. Whut's de next piece? Who speaks?

LORINA—[*Boldly.*] How 'bout the dying song?

ILA—[*Nervously.*] No, no, le's don't sing that.

MAISIE—Come on, Ila, don't you like to have the shivers? Yeh, sing it, Uncle Jed, sing it.

LORINA—Ila don't like mo'nful music. She's slam scared to death when a' owl hoots even. [UNCLE JED *hesitates.* LORINA *speaks half-sarcastically.*] Don't you like it either, Uncle Jed?

DOUG—Where's yo' guts, brother?

UNCLE JED—Sho' we'll sing it. Evehbody ready, heah we go. [*He leads off in a low minor. With the exception of* ILA *the others join in. She sits on the bed swaying with the music and looking at the floor.*]

In de mawning, in de evening

OTHERS—

Somebody called my name.

UNCLE JED—

Devil creeping, po' man sleeping.

OTHERS—

Somebody called my name

ALL—

Heah me, Jesus!
Calling my name.
Have muhcy, Lawd!
Calling my name.

[*The pounding and clapping begin again.*]

Midnight hearse and coffin waiting,
Somebody called my name.
Devil walking, God's a-talking,
Somebody called my name.

(*Chorus*)

World on fiah, de heabens falling,
Somebody called my name.
Mo'ner crying, sinner dying,
Somebody called my name.

(*Chorus*)

The song is repeated, and the music stops. They sit silent a moment. BROTHER DAY *stands up.*

LORINA—[*With a forced laugh.*] That's a mournful song all right. But what's the use o' our setting here like people in a trance. Ain't nothing but a song.

BROTHER DAY—Brothern and sisters, that'll be a day to be remembered!

ILA *turns suddenly and throws herself sobbing on the bed.* BROTHER DAY *stirs uneasily.* UNCLE JED *sits down and wipes his forehead with a dirty rag which he draws from his pocket.*

DOUG—[*Shrugging his shoulders and lighting another cigarette.*] Ain't no use bothering with Ila. Let her cry a bit, do her good.

He strums his guitar with a weak show of confidence. BROTHER DAY *goes on.*

BROTHER DAY—It's wrote that some these days 'bout three o'clock, they's going to be a great shaking and thundering and a great smoke is going to rise up in the west, and the rocks'll melt and run lak rivers o' red-hot arn.

ILA *sobs out loudly.*

LORINA—[*To* DOUG.] What's the matter with 'em all, acting like scared hens and a hawk after 'em!

ILA—[*In a muffled voice.*] I'm a sinner, I'm a sinner! Have mercy on me! Lawd, have mercy!

LORINA—Just listen at her ruining our good time!

DOUG—Dis a quair place foh gitting religion.

LORINA—She'll be all right in a minute.

BROTHER DAY—[*Staring before him.*] In that day when the sun goes down, death'll come riding, riding on his great white hoss, and we'll see him in the dark that's over the face o' the earth.

AUNT BELLA—[*Fearfully.*] It's so, it's so, us will. It's wrote in de Book.

UNCLE JED *wipes his face with trembling hands. And the others stare about them half-afraid.*

BROTHER DAY—And they'll be a sound of gnashing teeth and crying to God.

PETE—Brother Day, don't say no more 'bout that.

BROTHER DAY—And death's going to call in the lane and squeal out he's waiting foh you. [*There is a silence for a moment. Presently* BROTHER DAY *shakes himself and laughs weakly.*] Well, I guess that day's a long ways off, and le's go on with our singing. Start up another piece, Brother Jed.

UNCLE JED *rises haltingly.*

AUNT BELLA—[*Listening.*] Wait a minute. I hears sump'n, folkses!

A low whining tune is heard outside the door, followed by soft sliding footsteps. The tapping of a stick on the floor comes in at the hall.

UNCLE JED—[*Sitting down suddenly.*] Whut's dat?

ILA—[*Bitterly, as she raises herself up in bed and dries her eyes.*] It's Gran'muh come back, that's what.

Before any one can move from his seat, the door at the rear opens and a little old black woman, wearing a slat bonnet and carrying a stick and a bundle, stands in the entrance. She pushes back her bonnet and pulls her spectacles from her white hair down to her nose and looks around the smoke-filled room. BROTHER DAY *makes a movement towards the door at the left.*

GRANDMUH—[*In a husky voice.*] Who's dis? Who's you all? Set raght back in yo' seat, Joe Day, I knows all o' you now. [*She peers from one to the other.* BROTHER DAY *sits down again.*] I had a feeling dey was trouble, trouble, and I come back. [*She moves a step into the room and looks at* LORINA.] Whah's my boy, whah's Angie? Tell me whah my boy is. [*Anxiously.*] He ain't—he ain't been messed up wid you all, is he?

LORINA—I don't know where he is.

GRANDMUH—[*Joyfully.*] Thank de Lawd. He's keeping straight den. [*Wrathfully.*] Whut you doing in my house, Joe Day? And you, Doug McCranie, trying to ruin my po' gals. And you, Bella

and Jed, whut you doing heah? And all de rest o' you trash—lak spitting in de face o' my God!

DOUG—Aw, we's having prayer-meeting and——

GRANDMUH—[*Half screaming.*] Shet yo' mouf! You'll be struck daid wid de lies you's telling. And I wahned you all 'bout blaspheming de Lawd in my house. Hain't I tried to be 'spectable and raise mah chilluns to live raght and have edgication? And heah all de low-down o' de neighborhood is whut dey laks to 'sociate wid. [*Coming another step into the room.*] And I's gwine stop it. Joe Day, and Jed, and all o' you—you knows me and you knows I gut power wid de Lawd. He heahs my prayehs. And I's gwine ax him—— [*Suddenly dropping her bundle, she raises her hands above her head and cries out in a loud voice.*] Oh, Lawd God, I cusses Joe Day wid fiah and brimstone fo'ever and ever to bu'n in hell.

She points a thin black finger at him, and he backs away from her, his eyes rolling in fear.

BROTHER DAY—[*With weak braggadocio.*] Don't you do that, don't you putt no cuss on me.

GRANDMUH—[*Sobbing and speaking in a high quavering voice.*] Give him no rest by day or night. Let him die inch by inch, and his body rot piece by piece! Make him to see visions of de debbil allus

after him breaving coals of fiah! Send de thunder and de lightning to bust open his grave when he dies and strew his bones in de stormy wind. I cuss him and cuss him and sets de wraff o' God upon his soul till de end o' time. Amen! Lawd, my Jesus!

BROTHER DAY *looks around him, hesitates and then suddenly dashes through the door at the left and into the night. With the exception of* DOUG, LORINA *and* ILA, *the others go out after him, mumbling and pushing as they go.* GRANDMUH *stands with lowered head, groaning to herself.* ILA *sits on the bed, staring dejectedly before her.*

DOUG—[*Turning and twisting in his chair.*] Look heah, I reckon I bedder go?

LORINA—Yeh, you better. And all our good times is—is shot to hell.

DOUG *picks up his guitar and rises.* GRANDMUH *looks up and* DOUG *backs away from her.*

GRANDMUH—[*Calmly.*] You needn't be afeared o' me no mo'. [*Wringing her hands together.*] Oh, I done wrong, I done wrong. I axed God to destroy his soul. [*She begins sobbing. Then she sits down in a chair and rocks back and forth with her hands to her head, saying over and over:*] I done wrong, I done wrong. Mah po' chilluns, you is losing yo' souls. Oh, I done wrong to cuss him so!

LORINA—[*Quietly to* DOUG.] Come on, Doug, and I'll git the wraps and things out of the hall and take 'em to the folks.

DOUG—And le's talk over 'bout de trip.

They go softly out at the rear and close the door behind them. A moment later their voices are heard outside in an indistinct medley of conversation with the others. GRANDMUH BOLING *sits rocking and moaning to herself. She rubs her hand across her forehead.*

GRANDMUH—Whah's Angie! I wants mah boy. [*Then she falls to rocking again and whining a tune that gradually rises into words.*]

> Evehbody's gut to go
> Fust place to de graveyahd,
> Den to de Judgment bah,
> Evehbody's gut to go.

[*Her singing stops and she mumbles to herself.*] Yeh, hit's de truf. Evehbody's gut to go. And hit's 'bout time I was a-gwine. Dey ain't no mo' pleasuh foh me below. And now I's gut down to putting a cuss on a man. [*She calls.*] Angie! [*Then she goes back to her rocking.*]

ILA—[*Getting up from the bed and coming over to her.*] Gran'muh!

GRANDMUH—[*Alarmed.*] Who's dat?

ILA—'Tain't nobody but me. Don't git started on yo' troubles. Lemme fix your supper.

GRANDMUH—[*Reaching out and clinging to her as she draws near.*] Ily, Ily, why you'n Reeny mess yo'se'f up wid dese low-down men? Chile, you breaks me all up wid de trouble of it. Yo' po' mammy would most nigh turn oveh in her grave, she knowed it.

ILA—[*Taking the lamp.*] I'll bring a bit in to you.

GRANDMUH—Whah's Angie?

ILA—He's gone to the store.

GRANDMUH—[*Rising out of her chair.*] To de sto'! Oh, he'll git into trouble wid liquor oveh dere. [*She wrings her hands together.*]

ILA—[*Somewhat ironically.*] He won't nuther. He promised you to let liquor alone.

GRANDMUH—Yeh, yeh, he did!

ILA—And he said he's going to bring you a big bladder o' snuff.

GRANDMUH—[*Joyously.*] Bless his dumpling heart! When he coming back?

ILA—Time he's back now. [*She goes out at the right rear.*]

GRANDMUH—Thank de Lawd one o' my chilluns

is growing up out o' sin. And I'll hab sump'n to live foh in mah las' days.

She folds her hands across her lap and sits looking out before her. When ILA *goes out with the lamp the room is almost in total darkness, save for a patch of light that shines in from the entry. A moment later the door at the rear opens and* LORINA *comes softly in.*

LORINA—[*Looking back.*] Come on in, they've gone into the kitchen.

DOUG *enters.* LORINA *goes to the chest and rummages in it.*

DOUG—Hurry up. Don't be playing wid me now. Git de dough. [*There is a sound of jingling coins.*] Aw, come on!

LORINA—That's all I got, I tell you.

DOUG—You's lousy wid de jack.

LORINA—I ain't got no more, and that's the truth.

DOUG—Neveh mind, den. On de ride we'll leave Brother Day and Ila over at Ed's place and den you and me, uh?

LORINA—Yeh, you and me and [*Cuttingly.*] my money!

DOUG—'Y God! You's spiteful as a cat. Ain't I fur-

nishing de cah? [*He grunts and hugs her to him.*] But how we going to git Ila wid us?

LORINA—She'll come all right. [*Listening.*] Who's that making a sound?

DOUG—Somebody crying or sump'n. By Jesus, it's heah in de room.

ILA *comes suddenly back with the light, bringing food on a tray. She stops and looks accusingly at* DOUG *and* LORINA. GRANDMUH *sits with her back to them, crying softly.*

DOUG—Why'n hell didn't she let us know she was heah, if it was going to make her cry mo'!

ILA—[*Setting the lamp and food on the table and speaking bitterly.*] Cry more. Yeh, we all needs to cry and pray or do something. Hell 'll ketch us yet, every last one of us.

GRANDMUH—You needn't bring me no rations. Who kin eat when sin is destroying all I loves. [*Stretching out her hand.*] Go on, Reeny, and sell yo' soul. I's done o' you. I gives you up. To-morrow I takes Angie and we's gwine git us anudder home and leave you'n Ila to rot in yo' sins. Git out o' heah, all o' you.

ILA—I'm going to do better—I——

GRANDMUH—Better! You cain't. You wuz a good

gal onct, but you ain't no mo'! [*She stands up and turns fiercely on them.*] Git from heah, I tells you —you rutting bitches, coupling lak goats. [*She raises her stick.*] Flee out o' dis house, 'fore it falls on you and scrushes you lak hit orter.

She drives them out at the rear.

ILA—[*At the door.*] Grandmuh, don't! You's doing me wrong. I—I——

GRANDMUH—[*Raising her voice and shaking her stick.*] Leave heah, leave heah, and go on and sleep wid Joe Day somewhah on de rivah bank de way you's planning.

ILA—[*Gloomily.*] All right, I'll go, and I'll never come back.

GRANDMUH *closes the door after her, and then comes back to her chair and sinks exhaustedly into it, rocking and mumbling to herself. A wagon is heard driving off, and a Ford horn rattles raucously. Suddenly she sits up and listens intently.*

GRANDMUH—[*Calling.*] Angie-e-ee! [*She begins rocking, swaying and talking again, half-singing and chanting.*]

> I's a beggar, Lawd! Don' you leave me heah.
> I's a beggar, Lawd! Don' you leave me heah.
> Gi'n me a sign, Ol' Moster, gi'n me a sign.

LORINA *opens the door cautiously at the rear and*

comes in. ILA *follows her. They go and take their hats from the wall.* ILA *stands looking mournfully at the old woman.*

LORINA—Come on, Ila. Let her be, with her religious spells and talking unknown tongues.

ILA—I don't lak to leave her.

She hesitates a moment and then they both go out. The automobile horn sounds again, and they are heard driving away.

GRANDMUH—

And I seed a light a-shining and hit said to me,
And I seed a cloud a-rising and hit said to me—
And de hills dey tuk fiah—um-um-um——

[*She rises and stands looking up as if under the spell of some supernatural power.*]

And de night come up and de sun went down——
A sign! Lawd Jesus, a sign!

She remains motionless, her lips working silently and her hands clawing at her dress. The door at the left opens and ANGIE *dashes in. His coat is torn and his shirt ripped open. With a cry, he stumbles towards her.*

ANGIE—Gran'muh! Keep 'em off'n me! Keep 'em off!

GRANDMUH—[*Joyfully.*] I's glad you's come. I

called you and called you. [*He throws his arms around her and pulls her down into her chair.*] We's gwine leave all dis and stay at anudder place, jes' you'n me. [*Sadly.*] I gi'n 'em up. And you'n me'll move out o' sin and be happy. [*She looks at him inquiringly. Then in alarm.*] Whut's de trouble?

She strokes his forehead.

ANGIE—[*Springing up and looking around him.*] Gran'muh, Gran'muh, they's after me. Save me, save me! I heah 'em coming!

GRANDMUH—[*Starting up in alarm.*] Whut's dat! Whut's dat! Whut you done?

ANGIE—[*Shuddering and clinging to her.*] He made at me with a knife and I shot him. Look, there he is! [*Pointing at the entry door.*]

GRANDMUH—Who was it? O Lawd ha' muhcy!

ANGIE—It was Gus Turner. I see him now with the blood jumping out'n him.

He falls on his knees and buries his face against her. She sits down.

GRANDMUH—[*Raising her head as she strokes his face.*] Ha' muhcy, ha' muhcy! [*She sits in silence.*]

ANGIE—And they's gone for the sheriff. They'll be heah foh me in a minute. Don't let 'em git me.

GRANDMUH—[*Sadly.*] Boy, I's loved you and prayed foh you since you was a baby and yo' pappy and mammy died, and hit's all come down to dis—I's done whut I thought raght all my life. And I's tried to be 'spectable. But de Lawd's done sent his sign, and you gut to suffah.

ANGIE—Stay with me, stay with me.

GRANDMUH—[*Pushing him suddenly from her.*] But you's done mu'deh, you's kilt a man. Git up from dat flo'. Git up. [*He slowly stands up. She points to the door at the left.*] Go back out dat do'. De sheriff man is a-waiting foh you.

ANGIE—[*Coming towards her as she stands up again.*] No, no—I cain't!

She convulsively clings to him and leans her head against his breast.

GRANDMUH—[*Softly.*] You ain't done nothing wrong, has you, Angie? You's jes' mah liddle boy.

A heavy tread comes on the porch, followed by a loud knock on the front door. A voice calls.

VOICE—Come on out, Angie!

ANGIE—O Lord, save me!

GRANDMUH—Leave me now! Go on, go on. Dey hain't nothing I kin do but pray foh you lak de ol' times. Don' look at me, Boy, you's gut to pay.

VOICE—Come out of there or we'll shoot you out!

GRANDMUH—[*Pointing to the door.*] Leave me, I tell you! [*Crying out.*] Gi'n yo'self up lak a man.

She opens the door at the rear and pushes him slowly out. Slamming the door behind him, she goes and falls in her chair twisting her hands and making no sound.

VOICE—Come on, fellows, here he is!

ANGIE—Lemme git back to her. I cain't leave her. [*They are heard taking him off. She sits and rocks and says nothing.* ANGIE *is heard calling from the road.*] Gran'muh! Oh, Gran'muh!

She stares before her, rocking faster and faster, her bony hands beating on the arms of her chair.

THE END OF THE ROW

"I looked up toward de northern pole
And seed black clouds of fiah roll. . . ."
—Negro song.

CHARACTERS

AUNT ZELLA—*a farm-hand.*
NORA—*her daughter, a farm-hand.*
LUCILE—*a farm-hand.*
LALIE—*a farm-hand.*
ED ROBERTS—*a young white man and farm-owner.*

TIME—*Noon on a late spring day several years ago.*
PLACE—*A field in eastern North Carolina.*

THE END OF THE ROW

IN *the middle foreground is a clump of shady umbrella china trees and shrubbery. Stretching off to the right and the rear are the wide cotton-fields glistening hot in the burning noonday sun. Several tin pails hang to the lower limbs of the china trees. A high monotonous singing is heard off the right, punctuated regularly by the "hanh, hanh" of hoes tearing through the dirt and grass. The singing and chopping draw nearer.*

Got up in de mawning,
Heahd my mother say,
Big white hoss come a-riding,
Death is on de way.

Shout hallelujah, hallelujah to de lamb,
Early in de mawning, death is on de way.

[*The singing stops and a mellow voice calls out:*] Come on heah, you slubbering niggers! Cain't you keep up wid a' old 'oman? [*The singing begins again, nearer.*]

Setting in de evening,
At de close o' day,
Mo'nfully I 'members,
Death is on de way.

Shout hallelujah, hallelujah to de lamb,
Early in de evening, death is on de way.

After a moment AUNT ZELLA *comes in at the right, stamping the dust and dirt from her feet and clothes. She is a stout middle-aged Negress, carrying a hoe in her hand. With sweat streaming from her face, she takes off her bonnet, fans herself and stands looking back the way she has come. The "hanh, hanh" of other choppers draws near. A voice calls:*

Help me out, Aunt Zella!

AUNT ZELLA—He'p you out! I sho' ain't gwine do it. Git out when you kin. Ef you cain't stay wid a hoe hand whut is a hoe hand, den you gut to hoe yo' own row. [*She sits down in the shade and undoes her shirtwaist down across her fat bosom, twisting her neck around and taking in deep breaths of air. Then she crooks up her leg and begins picking at the bottom of her bare foot.*] Lawd, dem li'l' saw-toof br'ars sho' do play thunder when dey gits in 'tween yo' toes.

While she is working at her feet, NORA *and* LUCILE *come in and throw their hoes down on the ground. They stand fanning themselves.*

LUCILE—[*A stout, chocolate-colored girl of eighteen.*] You want to help Lalie out wid her row?

NORA—[*A pert, dark mulatto, about the same age.*] Naw, let her git out herself, dragging 'way back there behind.

LUCILE—Aunt Zella, yo' row had a lot o' skips, dat's why you beat us out.

AUNT ZELLA—Listen at dat gal! Skips! I allus leads de hoe-hands. Dey ain't nobody in dis country kin kill crabgrass de way I kin, dat's my repitation. [*Snorting.*] Hunh, ef you gals'd take off dem dere gloves and th'ow away dem shoes, you mought step along in front. Des' look at dat Lucile—gut on her Sunday paten' leathers!

NORA—And if you'd wear shoes, Muh, you wouldn't allus have your feet full o' br'ars and your toe nails tore up, let 'lone the ground-eetch eating you to the bone.

AUNT ZELLA—Never mind dat. Dey's my feet, I reckon. And ef I did wear shoes, I'd buy 'em myse'f. I bet Antney gi'n you dem shoes, didn't he, Lucile?

LUCILE—I gut 'em over de river.

AUNT ZELLA—Over de river! Antney gi'n 'em to you. [*Laughing meaningly.*] And dat nigger didn't do it foh nothing—hah?

LUCILE—[*Smiling and not noticing her sarcasm.*] 'Tain't all he's gi'n me nuther.

AUNT ZELLA—Haw, haw, haw! I reckons it hain't. When you'n him gwine marry?

LUCILE—Not yit awhile.

She sits down and begins wiping the dust from her new shoes. NORA *sits watching them admiringly.*

NORA—How much you reckon they cost?

LUCILE—[*Shrugging her shoulders.*] Mus' been 'bout six dollars.

AUNT ZELLA—Six dollars! And dat fool nigger sweating his guts out over at dat saw-mill foh a dollar and a ha'f a day.

LUCILE—He's done ordered me a lavaliere from way off yonder, too.

NORA—[*With a touch of envy.*] Has he?

AUNT ZELLA—Well, he sho' is pushing you. Hain't said nothing 'bout marrying you, has he?

LUCILE—No, he ain't. Why I want to marry?

AUNT ZELLA—You gut mo' sense'n I thought. Dat's right, bleed him foh all you kin while de bleeding's good and you don't have to pay too much foh it.

She looks straight at LUCILE. NORA *sits looking at the ground, lost in thought.*

LUCILE—I knows whut you mean. But I reckons you mought 'member you had Nora dere befo' you'n Uncle Jeems merried.

AUNT ZELLA—[*Laughing.*] I sho' did. But dey won't no so'headed nigger her daddy. Hit was a white man and one o' de stroppingest dey is walking. Now you cain't say dat much, kin you? Haw, haw, haw!

LUCILE—[*Disconcerted.*] Well, de white men ain't never tuk to me somehow.

AUNT ZELLA—Dat dey ain't. You's too nigh lak a stick-and-dirt chimley, you's ugly as Ol' Scratch.

LUCILE—[*Hotly.*] I don't want no white man, nohow.

AUNT ZELLA—[*Wagging her head.*] Whedder you wants him or not, I knows dis—it'll be a freeze in August when you gits one, adder yo' cutting up and carrying on wid foolish Antney.

LUCILE—[*Sarcastically.*] You's a sight to be talking now and you done gone by de boa'd! And look at me wid de fine things I gits out'n Antney. You ain't even gut no shoes, and dem dere o' Nora's is full o' holes.

NORA—[*Coming out of her reverie with a snap.*] You needn't be throwing off on me. 'Twon't be long and I'll have dollars where you got cents, and clothes! Lord, I'll make 'em all sick on Sunday, see if I don't!

AUNT ZELLA—Haw, haw, haw! Now whut you gut to say?

LUCILE—How you gwine do dat, Nora? Aw, you's des' talking, ain't you?

NORA—I shore ain't. I'm keeping my eyes open, and when I brings home the game, it'll be game what is game, not no crazy Antney Russell.

AUNT ZELLA *rolls her eyes in merriment.*

LUCILE—[*Curiously.*] Who is it you gut yo' eyes on, Nora?

NORA—That's all right.

LUCILE—Whut nigger kin it be?

NORA—Nigger! Hunh, 'tain't no nigger! Whut you think I am?

AUNT ZELLA—You 'spects my gal to consort wid a nigger raght off de bat? She kin do dat later.

LUCILE—Who is it, Nora?

NORA—I don't min' telling you. It's de richest white man in de country.

AUNT ZELLA—[*Complacently.*] It sho' is.

LUCILE—[*In amazement.*] Lawd, you don't mean Mr. Ed!

NORA—[*Taking off her gloves and looking at her*

brown hand.] What's to hinder me from meaning him?

AUNT ZELLA—Now whah is you and yo' Antney? Whut's he now!

LUCILE—[*Scornfully.*] He won't look at you, him wid all dese thousan' acres o' land his pap lef' him. He wouldn't spet on you. I bet he don't even know yo' name hardly.

NORA—You needn't be so uppity 'cause you're jealous and know you ain't got no show. You jest wait and see.

AUNT ZELLA—Dey ain't no white man gwine stand out ag'in' a good-looking gal lak Nora. But I done laid down de law—Mr. Ed's de only one or nothing.

NORA—He's the only one I want. [*Beating her fist against her thigh.*] And I'm going to have him.

LUCILE—My, my, you sho' is a bold critter, Nora. No other nigger gal'ud think o' sich.

NORA—They ain't got the nerve, that's why. Every one of 'em'd stick they hands in the fire for the chanct, but they're a-scared to come out and try.

AUNT ZELLA—Dey air dat. Dey'd all make a dive at him ef dey could.

LUCILE—[*Pointing off to the right.*] How 'bout Lalie dere?

AUNT ZELLA—[*Pondering.*] Lalie—hunh, I done fohgot her. [*Shaking her head.*] Mebbe Lalie wouldn't, mebbe not. I dunno dough, cain't never tell.

NORA—[*Spitefully.*] Course Lalie would. She ain't half as good as she makes out she is. Most of it's put on.

AUNT ZELLA—I dunno 'bout dat, Nora. Dey ain't a s'picion ag'in' Lalie's chareckter. And she's had a hard time too, po' gal, wid her muh dying on her dese two yeah. But she sticks and don't never complain.

LUCILE—Whut's de matter wid her to-day? She chops slower'n most times.

NORA—She wants to stay behind so she won't have to 'sociate with us. Everybody knows she's as biggity as she can be.

AUNT ZELLA—I ain't never found her stuck up a bit. Dey's sump'n on her mind, dat's whut.

LUCILE—Mebbe she's thinking 'bout dem books she's read. Dey say she reads a pow'ful heap foh a nigger.

AUNT ZELLA—I heahd she's trying to git de school at Flat Branch next yeah.

NORA—She told me she was. Next month she's going over the river to stand examination for a ce'tificate.

LUCILE—Whah'd she git all dat hankering foh 'rithmetics and grammars and g'ographies? Never seed nobody lak her.

AUNT ZELLA—She 'herited it f'om her white daddy, I 'spects. Dey says he was some kind o' writer whut stayed 'roun' heah a while and den went away and never come back.

NORA—All her learning won't git her nowhere in this country. Them that gits education is looked down on by the white folks.

AUNT ZELLA—Sho' is—— But le's shet up and eat our dinner. Dere's Lalie most out. Bring dat bucket down, Nora.

NORA *gets the largest of the buckets from the treè, and they begin eating their dinner.*

LUCILE—I des' been thinking dat if Mr. Ed tuk a notion to any o' de colored gals, it seems dat Lalie'd be de one.

NORA—[*Quickly.*] He won't look at her, Lucile.

LUCILE—He mought.

NORA—He won't though. He's sorter stand-off like, and a gal's got to go after him herself.

LUCILE—[*Reaching for her bucket and sitting down.*] Hunh, she mought a-been gwine after him foh all you know. She's knowed to be de purtiest gal around, and she's gut mo' sense and has high notions 'bout raising de niggers out'n sin and sich.

NORA—[*Somewhat angrily.*] Eat your dinner, she'll hear you talking. [*Leaning towards* LUCILE.] You ain't seed nothing s'picious, have you, Lucile?

LUCILE—[*Cunningly.*] Yes, mebbe I have—— Mebbe Mr. Ed's already tuk a liking foh her.

AUNT ZELLA—[*Looking up quickly, her spoonful of peas halfway to her mouth.*] How come? How you know?

NORA—She don't know. She's jest trying to rile me with her lies.

LUCILE—Well, I seed him standing in de do' talking to her when I passed Lalie's house yistiddy.

AUNT ZELLA—Nothing in dat. He was des' down to see how her muh was gitting on.

NORA—Course. She's his tenant and her muh bad off, and why wouldn't he come around and see how they git on?

LUCILE—Aw right ef you want to b'lieve dat.

At a sign from AUNT ZELLA *they fall to eating.* LALIE *is heard chopping at the right.* AUNT ZELLA *calls out.*

AUNT ZELLA—Peas and hoecake time, Lalie.

LALIE—Well, I'm glad I'm out at last.

She comes in and drops her hoe and sits down fanning herself. She is a very light mulatto of twenty or twenty-two, with regular features and intelligent face. She is dressed in shabby but clean clothes and wears no gloves.

AUNT ZELLA—[*Looking at* LUCILE *and* NORA.] We was thinking o' helping you out, Lalie, but we was so tar'd.

LALIE—[*Wiping her face with a clean handkerchief.*] Oh, that's all right. I oughta chopped harder.

AUNT ZELLA—You do chop slower'n usual. Whut's de matter?

LALIE—[*Hesitating.*] Not much of anything. I was up most of the night with Muh, and I feel pegged out.

AUNT ZELLA—How's she gitting now?

LALIE—No better as I can see. Her cough's worse.

AUNT ZELLA—Dat's bad, bad.

LUCILE—[*After a moment.*] Ain't you gwine to eat yo' dinner, Lalie?

LALIE—I'm not hungry now. [*Looking over the burning fields.*] Isn't it hot?

NORA—[*Pointedly.*] Ain't it hot? Yeh, hot as hell!

LALIE *looks up quickly and then stares across the fields again.*

AUNT ZELLA—You cut out dat weeked talk, gal! Lalie ain't used to no sich.

LALIE—Never mind me. Let her talk that way if she wants to.

NORA—[*Wrathfully.*] I feel I'd ort to all right, if you want to know how I feel.

LUCILE—[*Grinning.*] Whut's de matter, Nora? You's gut mad as a hornet all of a suddent, ain't you?

NORA—What if I have? You got nothing to do with it.

AUNT ZELLA—Heah, heah, le's not git tore up, it's too hot.

LUCILE—You hadn't ort to snap at me lak dat, Nora.

NORA—[*Throwing her hunk of bread from her.*] Shet up your damn mouth!

LALIE—Nora!

NORA—[*Turning towards her with a sneer.*] Unh-hunh, you don't like my talk, you so high and mighty. Well, you mess with me, and you'll hear more of it. I'll cuss you out to a you know what, I will!

LALIE *turns away with hurt face.*

AUNT ZELLA—God A'mighty, whut ails you—a run-mad dog done bit you? And don't you say nary 'nudder word to Lalie, heah me?

NORA—Why, I'd like to know? She ain't no better'n we are.

AUNT ZELLA—Dat kind o' gab ain't fitten foh nobody to heah. Now le's go on wid our dinner in peace.

LALIE—[*Standing up.*] I guess I'd better go back to chopping till Nora finishes her dinner. She must have a grudge against me or something.

LUCILE—No, you don't, Lalie. Set down and eat yo' dinner here with us; we ain't gut no bad feelings ag'in' you.

AUNT ZELLA—Yeh, set down, gal, and rest and eat yo' grub. You'll need sump'n to prop up yo'

backbone time de bull-bats is a-flying. Heah, take a piece o' dis blackberry pie. [*She takes a cut out of the bucket.*]

NORA—Yeh, yeh, go ahead and eat and don't notice me.

LALIE—[*Hesitating and then sitting down.*] Thank you, Aunt Zella, I don't want a thing to eat now. I've got a plenty in my bucket there. [*She indicates the bucket hanging in the tree.*] When I get hungry, I'll eat.

AUNT ZELLA—[*A little sharply.*] Aw right, suit yo'se'f den. I ain't begging nobody to eat my rations.

LALIE *starts to reply but bites her lip.*

NORA—Maybe you feel too proud to eat Muh's cooking.

LALIE—[*Throwing out her arms.*] Good Lord, no! [*Turning to* AUNT ZELLA.] You don't feel that way about it, do you?

AUNT ZELLA—I ain't saying yes ner no. But you does act stuck up lak 'bout all de time. Why you think you's better'n us udder niggers?

LALIE—[*Nervously.*] I don't, I don't.

NORA—You act mighty like it. Anyhow everybody in the country thinks that way about you, don't

they, Lucile? And they's plenty of 'em in de neighborhood white as you are.

LUCILE—I 'spects so. [*Suddenly.*] Well, if dey do, it's de right way to feel. Lalie's better'n you'n me, and dat's de long and short of it.

NORA—I'm one that don't think so, and you can stick that in your year.

LALIE—[*Looking at her with tears in her eyes.*] And you're right about it, Nora. I'm not any better than any other colored girl, and I don't want anybody to think so.

LUCILE—Des' de same you's gut eddication and you never carry on wid no nigger men.

AUNT ZELLA—Dat's so, ain't it, Lalie? Dat po' Sol Jenkins been flying 'roun' you foh th'ee yeahs, and he's furder off f'om gitting you dan ever he was.

LALIE—Sol hasn't been to see me for six or eight months.

LUCILE—'Cause you wouldn't let him.

NORA—You'd better not let your swell head make you throw Sol down. Ain't another young nigger in the country owns his own farm and has money in the bank like he has.

AUNT ZELLA—Co'se he ain't lousy wid learning lak you, Lalie, but he'd sho' take some yo' trouble off'n you. Nobody kin see whut you gut ag'in' him.

LALIE—I've got nothing in this wide world against him. But Sol's going to be married next Saturday.

AUNT ZELLA—G'won. Is he?

NORA—Has Callie got him at the last?

LALIE—I reckon so. She's the one he's going to marry.

AUNT ZELLA—Lawd, Lawd, I knows dat gal's happy to her gizzard. She's had her trap sot a long time foh Sol. But he's a slam fool. She'll bre'k him up, take a bank to hold her. I reckon she'd never a-cotched him ef you hadn't give him de complete go-by. [*Popping her lips.*] Pshaw, Sol don't love dat critter, he loves you, Lalie.

LUCILE—Quare to me you'd turn him down. Ain't you ever gwine git you a man, Lalie?

LALIE—No, I'm never going to have a man. Now, don't you think that's terrible?

LUCILE—Seems sorter onnatural lak.

AUNT ZELLA—Allus gwine live by yo'se'f?

LALIE—No, I've got Muh.

AUNT ZELLA—[*Shaking her head.*] Yeh, but you ain't gwine have her long.

LALIE—What you mean?

AUNT ZELLA—Don't git upsot now. I dies' mean she cain't stay wid you fohever. And when she do go, whut you 'spect to do?

LALIE—Maybe by that time I'll have the school or some sort of job. But let's get off the subject of me.

NORA—[*After a moment.*] I cain't see why Lalie'd turn Sol Jenkins down 'less they's something in what Lucile said a little bit ago.

AUNT ZELLA—Whut'd she say?

NORA—You know whut it was.

LUCILE—I ain't said nothing.

NORA—Yes, you have. You know what you said about Lalie and somebody else.

AUNT ZELLA—Heigh, you keep dat to yo'se'f.

NORA—I won't that. I b'lieve they's something in it after all.

LALIE—[*Uneasily.*] What'd she say about me and somebody else?

AUNT ZELLA—Now, Nora, don't you say no mo'.

NORA—She said maybe you was casting eyes where you had no business.

LUCILE—[*Angrily.*] I didn't say no sich.

NORA—That's what you meant jest the same.

LALIE—What in the world you talking of?

AUNT ZELLA—Nothing, nothing, Lalie. Don't pay no 'tention to whut Nora says. She's mad wid de heat and red-bugs.

NORA—No, I'm not. I'm mad with you, Lalie Fowler, you and your fine ways. You make me tired. You set as well with me as grass in a dog's belly. You're a hypocrite, and you're all humbug through and through, you are that!

LALIE—I can see that you don't like me well enough. And I reckon my learning is pretty weak. [*Suddenly clenching her hand.*] But some day I am going to know things, and I'll teach the negro children in this neighborhood better'n they've ever been taught, folks'll see I will. Lord, Lord, it's hard enough without you worrying me!

NORA—[*Standing up and looking at her.*] Listen at her, will you! Think you'll throw me off with them rolling words, do you? Well, you won't. [*She wipes her mouth with her sleeve.*] And I'm going to spit something right out at you. Listen, ain't your

mind this minute on—on—Mr. Ed Roberts—ain't it? [LALIE *locks her hands together.*] Speak up, tell me.

AUNT ZELLA *and* LUCILE *watch her closely.*

LALIE—[*Coldly.*] I don't have the least idea what you're driving at.

NORA—[*Her eyes blazing, and pointing her finger at* LALIE.] Oh, you don't, do you? Well, I mean that you've been making eyes and purty faces at Mr. Ed all for your own good time and maybe a fine roll o' greenback.

LALIE—[*Blinking at her.*] You're crazy!

NORA—Hunh—I've got more sense right now than I ever had. And I warn you that I got the same idee myself, and I won't 'low no butting in.

LALIE—[*Hotly.*] Are you trying to insult me? [*She stands up and gets her bucket.*] Please don't say another word to me. You're as silly as you're crooked. [*She sits down and opens her bucket without noticing* NORA.]

NORA—[*Choking with anger.*] What you call me! Mess with me and I'll snatch your purty hair out in handfuls. [*She moves towards her.*]

AUNT ZELLA—[*Yelling.*] You come back and set down, Nora! Lalie ain't gut no sich notions in her haid. I done told you dat.

NORA—[*Stopping, as* LALIE *shows no sign of moving.*] I know better. Anyhow, I've give her fair warning.

LALIE—[*Closing her bucket and hanging it again in the tree.*] Fair warning about what?

AUNT ZELLA—Eat yo' dinner, chile, you won't be able to hold out till night.

NORA—Fair warning 'bout Mr. Ed. 'Tend to your own business if you want to keep my fingers out'n your eyes.

LALIE—You mean you're planning—planning about Mr. Ed?

NORA—You heard me. [LALIE *breaks off a twig and begins picking at it.*] And I mean you want to have him yourself and I ain't going to let you. Now what you think o' that?

LALIE—[*Bursting out.*] It's a dirty lie, a dirty lie, as dirty as you are!

NORA—[*Eyeing her.*] Maybe you ain't planning it, but I got my doubts. And don't you call me no dirty lie if you know what's good for you.

LALIE—[*Blinking the angry tears from her eyes.*] You've got no right to think such things.

NORA—Well, what was he doing down at your

house twict last week, I want to know? That in the daytime and I don't know about the night.

LALIE—Stop it! [*Quietly.*] He came to see how Muh was getting on.

NORA—[*Sucking her lips scornfully.*] No young fellow's that much interested in a old nigger woman and she et up with consumption.

LALIE—[*Putting her fingers in her ears.*] I don't want to hear another word from you.

NORA—You will though. If you ain't laying up plans, he is, and that's the truth.

LALIE *impulsively snatches her hoe from the ground and starts towards* NORA.

LALIE—Stop it! He's straight and clean and honest, and it's your hateful evil-mindedness that makes you talk so. You ought to be ashamed as long as you live for saying that about him.

NORA—[*Defiantly, as she backs away from her.*] He may not be the walking Jesus you think he is. And yah—yah, in a few days I'll be wearing finery his money's paid for.

LALIE—[*Helplessly.*] That's what you're up to, is it? [*Scornfully.*] Look at you and Aunt Zella and Lucile—look at all the negro girls around here. Always thinking of having a good time and no matter

how they get it. You never think of anything except the present, let the future go as it will. What morals you got? None. The goats and hogs in a pasture are better. What you care for education and clean living and building up homes and having healthy children? Not a thing. Can't you see we'll never get anywhere living the way we have? Your whole life is spent in filling your stomach and catering to every whim that rises in you. How can I ever do anything in all this mess, how can I! [*She whirls on* AUNT ZELLA.] How do you expect Nora to be anything beside the dirty huzzy she is and you bringing her up the way you have! And you, Lucile, with your greasy Antney. [*Her voice rising shrilly.*] Why 'n the name of heaven don't you marry him and try to be something besides a bag of gluttony! [*Waving her hands at them.*] Get away from here and leave me alone, all of you. Go on! [*She turns and leans against a tree, her shoulders heaving with sobs. Her words are hardly distinguishable.*] Oh, Lord, it's a mess, it's all a mess.

AUNT ZELLA—Lawd Jesus, I never heerd sich a passel o' talk!

NORA—Something she learned out'n a book. Sounds like a speech.

LUCILE—[*Getting to her feet.*] You all come on and le's go to de spring and git some water.

NORA—All that storm o' talk don't faze me none. I'll do what I please, and she ain't going to stop me.

LALIE—[*Looking up, her eyes alight with hate.*] Go ahead then. But you'll never touch Mr. Ed, never! I'll kill you first!

NORA—[*In amazement.*] Great God! Unh-hunh, I knowed you had eyes set for the same meat. You cain't fool me. But I done warned you to let him alone. [*To* LUCILE *and* AUNT ZELLA.] Come on, le's git some water.

They go out at the right rear. LALIE *sits down at the foot of a tree and rests her face upon her knees. Presently she stops crying. In a moment* ED ROBERTS *comes in from the left and stands watching her. He is an ungainly young fellow of twenty-five or thirty, dressed in strong outdoor clothes. Presently he calls out gently, in an anxious, hesitating manner.*

ED—What's the matter, Lalie? [*She starts up in embarrassment.*]

LALIE—Why—why, Mr. Ed, I didn't know you were around.

ED—I thought I'd drop over and see how you folks were getting along with this grassy cotton. Haven't been crying, have you?

LALIE—No—no, maybe not, I was just sitting there thinking.

ED—[*Laughing and catching nervously at a bush.*] I'm—I'm afraid you think too much. Trying to plan out some way of bettering the nigger race?

LALIE—I was thinking that I'd have to give up trying, Mr. Ed.

ED—[*After a moment.*] Were?

LALIE—Sometimes everything seems to be absolutely crosswise in this world.

ED—[*Soberly.*] Yes, it does. This one of the times it seems that way?

LALIE—Yessir.

He suddenly drops his head and begins digging in the dirt with his shoe. LALIE *timidly raises her eyes and watches him.*

ED—[*Looking up.*] Lalie—— [*Breaking off.*] Why do you stare at me that—that funny way?

LALIE—[*Stammering.*] How—what way?

ED—[*Quickly.*] Never mind. It was nothing. Set down and rest, Lalie. The sun's hot enough to give you brain fever. [*She sits down and hides her shabby shoes with her skirt. In her embarrassment she begins stripping a weed.* ED *throws himself down on*

the ground, fanning with his wide-brimmed hat.] Lord, it's hot all right. Good weather to kill grass. How'd you get along this morning?

LALIE—Purty well. But somehow I couldn't keep up with the others.

ED—Guess you need sleep, don't you?

LALIE—It wouldn't hurt me, I reckon. But I couldn't sleep if I had the chance.

Noticing that he is lying down, she stands up and looks across the fields.

ED—What's the trouble?

LALIE—I don't know hardly. For one thing I've just preached a sermon to Aunt Zella and the rest, and they've gone down to the spring mad with me. It left a bitter taste in my mouth. And I don't think a word I said made a bit of impression.

ED—Don't mind them, Lalie, they're not worth the powder'n lead it'd take to kill 'em.

LALIE—But they are, Mr. Ed. And I don't seem to get along with them any better than I do with other colored people. They're all suspicious of my trying to learn and get ahead in books. They all believe I'm a humbug and feel myself too good for them. But I don't, not in that way.

ED—Well, set down and tell me 'bout it. [*But she remains standing.*]

LALIE—I'm near 'bout sure they won't give me the school next year. But if I don't want to hang around with a crowd of loafers on the street corners in Lillington every Saturday and shout and carry on at meetings and such, they ought not to condemn me for my way of doing things, had they?

ED—[*Drumming on his thigh, ill at ease.*] Course not. But don't get excited. Set down and rest yourself. [*She looks at him timidly.*] Why don't you set down?

LALIE—I—I'd as leave stand up.

ED—All right, just as you like. What'd you lay down the law to Aunt Zella about?

LALIE—[*Hurriedly.*] I didn't mean to blurt out a tale of troubles. It was nothing worth mentioning, just a little mix-up.

ED—But you seem all cut up over something. Is Aunt Mary worse?

LALIE—She's no better, I reckon.

ED—But she'll improve if you use that money to buy her better food and have the doctor regularly —at least she'll be helped some.

LALIE—Maybe so.

ED—I know she will. [*With sudden pity.*] And, Lalie, you need a pair of shoes.

LALIE—[*Trying to hide her feet.*] Please, sir——

ED—Set down and you can keep 'em covered up. I've asked you three or four times to.

LALIE—I—I can't sit down and—and you like that.

ED—[*Sitting up quickly.*] Oh, I forgot. You want me to stand up.

LALIE—[*Nervously.*] Perhaps it'd be more proper if one of us stood up.

ED—[*His face flushing.*] I'll stand up then. [*He gets to his feet and she sits down. In a low voice.*] You certainly keep your distance, Lalie.

LALIE—[*Humbly.*] Yessir.

ED—You're thinking how it looks, are you? Well, there's nobody to see us.

LALIE—[*Uneasily.*] I—I don't know what you mean, hardly.

ED—[*Kicking the dirt again.*] Nothing. But I can't see why you—well, why you want to be so drawn off to yourself. You're tending my land, at least living on it. Why can't you tell me your troubles and let me help you out?

LALIE—[*Unhappily.*] But suppose you can't help?

ED—I can though. I think I already have. The money I gave you yesterday ought to help you, for one thing.

LALIE—[*Perplexedly.*] I—I thought that was a loan. I borrowed it from you, and it will help us. But the Lord knows how soon I'll be able to pay it back—not till I get the school.

ED—[*Sharply.*] But I gave it to you, and I'm not going to let you pay it back.

LALIE—[*Impetuously.*] You're too good to us, Mr. Ed. No, no, I got to pay it back.

ED—[*Turning and staring away again.*] Look how that heat dances in the fields. [*Abruptly.*] Have you started reading the books I gave you?

LALIE—They were borrowed too, Mr. Ed.

ED—[*Bluntly.*] They were not. You're going to keep 'em.

LALIE—[*Quietly.*] I've read the one on rural schools already.

ED—You're smart all right. How many years before you're going off to college?

LALIE—When I've saved enough teaching.

ED—Pshaw, by that time you'll be fifty years old. And your mother's to be took care of.

LALIE—I'll make it somehow.

ED—Maybe going to college is not as great a thing as you think it is. I found it that way. One year was enough for me. Say, suppose I said I didn't want you to go?

LALIE—You can't say that though—can you?

ED—Why can't I?

LALIE—Why just last week you were saying how nice it would be for me to go to Raleigh and take some courses. And—and I thought all the time that was why you were lending me the books.

ED—Oh, well, a lot of things can happen in a week. Especially if you're staying in a house all by yourself. I been thinking—I got a proposition to make to you, Lalie.

LALIE—Yessir.

ED—How would you like to leave off this blistering in the fields and slaving in the sun?

LALIE—I'd like it better than anything.

ED—You can if you want to. [*Kicking in the dirt again.*] Now you won't think so much of what I'm going to suggest. But it would be a lot better for you than it sounds. How'd you like to come up to the house and cook for me?

LALIE—[*Her face falling.*] I'm afraid I—no, I couldn't do that, Mr. Ed.

ED—[*Unhappily.*] I thought maybe you'd feel too fine for such a job.

LALIE—I don't mind the work, but—but——

ED—Then why couldn't you? I'll pay you whatever you say.

LALIE—I'd love to come and fix things for you, yes, I would, but I can't.

ED—Well, why not?

LALIE—I don't know, maybe.

ED—You don't exactly see why I'm asking you, do you?

LALIE—[*Lowering her eyes.*] No, sir.

ED—I'll tell you. [*Boldly.*] It's because I don't want you to go away.

LALIE—[*Her lips trembling.*] You're too good to us, and we not even able to keep you paid up for what we eat, not counting all the other things.

ED—Lord, you're worth more than I can ever give you.

LALIE—[*In a low voice.*] No, sir; no, sir; I'm not.

ED—[*Stumbling over his words.*] Yes, you are.

You're—the finest girl I ever saw almost, white or —or colored.

LALIE—[*Hiding her face in her arms.*] Please don't talk like that.

ED—Don't you like to be told that you're fine and good and——

LALIE—Not by you, Mr. Ed. You mustn't——

He fingers his hat and kicks at a bunch of grass. Presently he turns to her.

ED—Lalie, I gave you that twenty-five dollars for Aunt Mary just because I like you.

LALIE—[*In alarm.*] Lord, Mr. Ed!

ED—Well, you don't think I'd been doing all these things for her unless I'd thought a lot of you, do you?

LALIE—[*Rising quickly to her feet.*] Oh, I don't know. [*With an effort she keeps back her tears.*]

ED—[*With a queer mournfulness.*] I think right much of you, Lalie.

LALIE—[*Stammering.*] Then you let me have the books just because you—you——

ED—[*As she stops.*] Yes, I did. Since I came back and took charge here and got to know you a little better, I—Lord, it's a lonesome place. [*She sits*

down and stares at the ground.] Now, Lalie, if you'll stay on here and be contented and everything, I'll see that you both have what you need and want. You'll never lack for anything. You know what I mean. You never will as long as I live. [*She says nothing.*] It's all foolishness, your plans about going out and educating the negroes and teaching school and building up the community. They don't want to be lifted up. That's not your business. I'll give you almost everything you want if you'll stay and forget the rot about the great works you're going to do. [*After a moment.*] Why don't you answer?

LALIE—[*Crying out.*] What can I say! It's all so, they don't want to be helped. [*Bursting out.*] But that ought to make no difference to me. I got to go on and do what I can. [*Pulling a roll of money from her apron pocket.*] Here's the money back, Mr. Ed. If Muh hadn't told me, maybe I'd never have thought of it. All this morning I been wondering what to do about it.

She holds the money out to him. He refuses it, and she drops it to the ground at his feet.

ED—[*In a hurt voice.*] Don't take on so, Lalie, I've told you I want you to keep it. [*Distressfully.*] I'd—I'd do anything for you!

LALIE—No, sir, I can't do it. [*Helplessly.*] What's to happen now! [*Half sobbing.*] All the time I've

worked on the books and studied and struggled along, I been thinking—maybe—maybe you'd be glad I'd done so much.

ED—And I am glad. You're the smartest girl I've ever seen. [*With a touch of joy in his voice.*] Did you think like that?

LALIE—Don't ask me, please, sir. It's not right to say such things.

ED—Well, I'll give you books right on.

LALIE—[*Suddenly bursting into sobs.*] I can't listen to what you say, Mr. Ed. You—you're different from me, and I've got to do what's right. [*Clenching her hands.*] I'd never have done a thing if it hadn't been for you. None of my people helped me a bit. I did all I have because you inspired me to. And now—now you talk so to me——

ED—[*Kindly.*] Don't cry. Lord, I'm a poor sort to inspire anybody.

LALIE—[*Impetuously.*] You're the best man in this whole world! You've been my only, only friend.

ED—You sure think more of me than I do myself. [*Decisively.*] You do like me some, don't you, Lalie?

LALIE—[*Shaking her head.*] You mustn't ask me, Mr. Ed.

ED—[*Fiercely.*] You do, say you do! [*She shakes her head again, and then nods a guilty assent, her voice breaking in a little wail.*] I knew it, and I'm glad, glad, I tell you. [*Watching her with worried face.*] I won't say any more to you now, poor child.

He picks up the money.

LALIE—You can't leave like that. I tell you I mustn't stay here. Please help me to do what's right. You know, you know, tell me what to do.

ED—I can't help you if it means letting you go away. [*He comes nearer and stands looking down at her.*] Dry your eyes. You're not the only one that's had to try to do what's right. I've thought it all over—— Well, anyway, I'm not going to let you go. Here's the money, take it back. [*She suddenly looks at him with her face alight and then falls down and hungrily embraces his feet. He lays his hand uncertainly on her head, and she springs up and stands away from him.*] Take the money back.

LALIE—I can't do it. Oh, Mr. Ed, we'd both be ruined if we went on. Help me.

ED—I'll go now. We'll talk it over later.

LALIE—There won't be any later. I'm going to leave to-morrow. I'm going off anywhere, somewhere.

ED—You're not, Lalie. You want to stay, and I want

you to stay. [*Stopping as he starts out at the left.*] Here's the money by this bush.

He goes out. LALIE *sits down sobbing. Soon the women come back from the spring. They stop in the background, whispering and watching her.*

AUNT ZELLA—[*Coming up to* LALIE.] Whut's de matter wid you? [*She makes no answer.*] Lawd, you cries lak a reg'lar wild 'oman!

NORA—Let her cry.

AUNT ZELLA—Is yo' muh daid sudden or sump'n?

LALIE—[*Suddenly taking her hoe and standing up.*] Oh, I was just having a baby cry. Let's go back to work. No use standing here at the end of the rows all day.

LUCILE—We ain't mo'n had time to git our wind back.

AUNT ZELLA—Git yo' hoes and le's be movin'.

They all pick up their hoes and go off at the right. The "hanh, hanh" *begins again.* LALIE *comes quickly back, and with a glance around her, gets the money and goes out.* AUNT ZELLA *is heard raising her song.*

Gut up in de mawning,
Heahd my mother say——

YOUR FIERY FURNACE

"De moon run down in purple stream,
De sun forbear to shine. . . ."

—Negro song.

CHARACTERS

ABRAHAM MCCRANIE—*a Negro farmer and school teacher.*
MUH MACK—*his mother.*
DOUGLASS—*his son.*
GOLDIE—*his wife.*

TIME—*An autumn evening several years ago.*
PLACE—*Abraham's home in eastern North Carolina.*

ABRAHAM MCCRANIE *sits at his desk in his house writing by a lighted lamp. He is a powerful, heavily built mulatto now of fifty or fifty-five with prominent features and short hair slightly graying. He is dressed in brown corduroy trousers, dark coat, army shirt and necktie. There is a sleepless, haggard look about his face, and now and then a rumbling cough interrupts him. On the wall above the mantelpiece a motto is tacked: "We Are Rising."*

Farther back and to the right of the fireplace sits MUH MACK *dozing and quarreling in her rocking-chair. Her head and face are hidden in a large slat bonnet. She wears heavy ragged shoes and dark unkempt dress. A dirty pink "fascinator" is draped over her bony shoulders, and a huge snuff brush protrudes from her lips which now and then describes a sort of waving motion as she moves her jaws in sleep. Between her knees she clasps a walking-stick.*

Through the window at the rear come bright streaks from the orange afterglow of the west. The November sun has set and the sky near the horizon is fading into a deep gloom under an approaching cloudiness. In the oaks outside the sparrows going to roost pour out a flooding medley of sharp calls resembling the heavy dripping of rain from the eaves. For a moment ABE *continues his writing and*

then lays down his pencil and replenishes the fire. He returns to his chair and sits drumming absently on the table. Presently he turns to MUH MACK *and speaks.*

ABE—You needn't say another word about it. I won't let him darken my door. [MUH MACK *stirs from her doze and sniffles into a dirty rag, wiping the rheumy tears from her eyes.* ABE *turns to his writing for another moment, then lays down his pen and stretches his arms back of his head with a weary yawn. He looks toward* MUH MACK *and speaks exultantly.*] That's the best I've ever done. They can't go against that, they can't.

MUH MACK—[*Sleepily rubbing her eyes and speaking coldly.*] Thank God you's finished yo' speech and'll soon be outen my sight and I kin git a liddle nap.

ABE—[*Not noticing her.*] That crowd's going to listen to me to-night.

MUH MACK—[*Scornfully.*] Mebbe dey will, but you's talked yo' life away, and it hain't come to nothing.

ABE—[*Looking at his speech.*] I've done my best this time. All I got from books and experience is there, and the truth's in it. [*He gathers the closely written sheets together.*] I tell 'em—— [*He turns*

to his speech and begins to read as he rises from his chair.] I say, Ladies and gentlemen [*He does not notice the movement of disgust* MUH MACK *makes as she turns away from him.*], this night is going to mean much in the lives of each and every one of us, big and little.

MUH MACK—Hit won't ef dey treats dey chil'en lak you treats yo' one.

ABE—[*Hurrying on.*] It marks the founding of The Cape Fear Training School, an institution that will one day be a light to other institutions around about. It is to be our aim here with the few teachers and facilities we can provide, to offer education to the colored children amongst us and offer it cheap. [*He turns toward* MUH MACK *and speaks with more spirit, as if his audience were directly before him. But she turns her back to him and blinks at the fire.*] Looking over the country, ladies and gentlemen, we see ten million souls striving in slavery, yea, slavery, brethren, the slavery of ignorance. And ignorance means being oppressed, both by yourselves and by others—hewers of wood and drawers of water. [*He picks up his pen and crosses out a word.*]

MUH MACK—[*Sarcastically.*] Dey hain't nobody in slavery. Ain't been since de surrender, and ef dey is, how come? And I reckon de hewers o' wood and de drawers o' water is 'bout as free as anybody.

ABE—[*Without noticing her.*] Ignorance means sin, and sin means destruction, destruction before the law and destruction in a man's own heart. The Negro will rise when his chareckter is of the nature to cause him to rise—for on that the future of the race depends, and that chareckter is mostly to be built by education, for it cannot exist in ignorance. Let me repeat that again, ladies and gentlemen. We want our children and grandchildren to march on towards full lives and noble chareckters, and that has got to come, I say, by education. We have no other way. We got to live clean lives and learn—and think, that's it. [*He strides in front of the old woman, who has dozed off again as she is wont to do under his eloquence. She raises her head with a jerk when he thunders at her.*] A little over fifty years ago the white man's power covered us like the night. Through war and destruction we were freed. But it was freedom of the body and not freedom of the mind. And what is freedom of the body without freedom of the mind? It means nothing, it don't exist. [*Throwing his arm out in a long gesture.*] What we need is thinking people, people who will not let the body rule the head. And again I cry out, education! I been accused of wanting to make the Negro the equal of the white man. That is false. I never preached such doctrine. I don't say that the colored ought to be made equal to the white in so-

ciety now. We are not ready for it yet. But I do say that we have equal rights to educating and free thought and living moral lives. With that all the rest will come. [*Pointing to his bookcase.*] Them books there show it. [*Caught up in the dream of his life, he pours out a roll of words and beats the air with his fist.*] Ladies and gentlemen, what's to hinder us from starting a great center of learning here, putting our time and our hope and money and labor into it and not into the many foolishnesses of this life. What little education I got was by lightwood knots, and after reading and studying all these years, I am just a small ways along. We must give the children of the future a better chance than we had. With this one school-building we can make a good start; then we can get more teachers, later on more equipment, and some day a library where the girls and boys can read about men that have done something for the world. And before many years pass we shall be giving instruction in how to farm, how to be carpenters, how to preach, how to teach, how to do anything. [*Forgetful of his written page, he shouts.*] And what will stop us in the end from growing into a great Negro college, a university, a light on a hill, a place the pride of both white and black! [*He stands a moment, lost in thought. Turning through the leaves of his speech, he looks towards* MUH MACK, *who sits hid under her bon-*

net.] Ain't that the truth, Muh Mack? Ain't it? [*Anxiously.*] They cain't stand out against that, can they? [*He coughs.*]

MUH MACK—Lawd Jesus! You's enough to wake de daid. And you brung on yo' cough ag'in.

ABE—[*Fiercely.*] I tell you it's going through. I believe the people here are with me this time.

MUH MACK—Sounds lak de same old tale. [*Bitterly.*] You's made dem dere speeches from Gawgy and Alabam' to I don' know where. It's foolishnesses, and you knows it. [ABE *arranges the leaves of his speech without listening to her.*] Time you's learning dat white is white and black is black, and God made de white to allus be bedder 'n de black. It was so intended from de beginning.

ABE—[*Staring at her and speaking half aloud.*] We been taught and kept believing that for two hundred years. [*Blazing out.*] But it's a lie, a lie, and the truth ain't in it.

MUH MACK—[*Going on in her whining, irritating voice.*] Yeh, all yo' life you's hollered Lawd and followed Devil, and look whut it's brung you to. Ef you'd a-putt as much time on picking cotton lately as you has on dat dere speech, you wouldn't have Mr. McCranie down on you de way he is. De truf's in dat all right.

ABE—[*Trying to control his nervousness and anger.*] I ain't a farmer. My business is with schools. [*Hotly.*] Can't you learn nothing? You dribbling old—here for twenty years you've heard me talk the gospel and it ain't made no impression on you. [*He turns away, realizing the vanity of his words to her. He speaks to himself and the shadows in the room.*] That speech is so! It's so, and I got to speak it that way. [*He looks about him with burning eyes and pleads as if with an unseen power.*] The truth's there. Can't you see it? [*His nostrils quiver and he goes on in a kind of sob, calling to the unbeliever hiding within the dark.*] God A'mighty knows they ain't no difference at the bottom. Color hadn't ought to count. It's the man, it's the man that lasts. [*Brokenly.*] Give us the truth! Give us the truth!

He coughs slightly as a queer look creeps over his face. For the moment he seems to sense an ultimate defeat before the hidden, unreachable enemy.

MUH MACK—[*Looking at the clock and snapping.*] Thought you's bound to be at de meeting by seven o'clock. Done near 'bout time. Git on, I wants my nap.

She pours snuff into her lip and turns to her snoozing again. With a hurried look at the clock, ABE *crams his speech into his pocket, gets his plug hat and blows out the lamp. The room is filled with*

great leaping shadows from the darting fireplace flames.

ABE—[*At the door.*] You remember what I said about Douglass.

MUH MACK—Git on, git on. [*Whining sarcastically.*] Sho' you'll be a light on de hill and de pride o' de land—and you won't even let a po' old grandmuh see her boy.

ABE—[*Turning back.*] Damn him, if he puts foot in this house he'd better not let me get hold of him. They ain't no man, flesh of my flesh or not, going to lie rotten with liquor and crooks around me. That's what I been talking against for twenty years. And I ain't changed during the last two years, neither.

MUH MACK—He mought a changed and wants to do bedder.

ABE—[*Coming back into the room.*] Changed enough so he like to got arrested in town yesterday, and it his first day back.

MUH MACK—[*Pleading in a high quavering voice.*] But I gut to see him. He's been gone two yea'h.

ABE—Let him come if he dares. You ruint him in his young days, and I don't want nothing more to do with him.

MUH MACK—[*Mumbling to herself.*] I's gwine see him 'fo' he goes back out yander ef I has to crawl slam to Lillington.

ABE—[*With brightening eyes.*] You heard me. He ain't no longer mine, and that's the end of it.

MUH MACK—[*Bursting out in a rage.*] And you ain't none o' mine. You's gut all de high notions of old Colonel McCranie and don't keer nothing foh yo' own. Git on. [*He stands looking at the floor, hesitating over something.*] Whut you skeered of, de dark?

ABE—[*Shuddering and going across the room and getting an old overcoat from a nail.*] Yes, I'm afraid of it. You're right, I'm none of yours. You know what I am—nothing but what you had to bring in the world because you mixed with a white man, not another thing. [*The despondent look comes back to his face and he speaks more calmly.*] I'll cut across the fields the near way, and tell Goldie not to worry, for I'll be back by ten with the school good as started. [*At the door he turns back again and calls to the old woman earnestly, but she is asleep.*] Muh Mack, don't let her worry, don't!—Aih, let her sleep, let us all sleep!

He goes out, closing the door softly behind him. A moment passes. The door at the left opens quietly, and DOUGLASS *stealthily enters, carrying a guitar*

by a strap over his shoulder and a small cheap handbag in one hand. He is dressed in the clothes of the "spo't," although they appear rather the worse for wear—a gray cap, light checkered suit, red flowing tie, white collar, pink socks, and tan shoes. The guitar and handbag he places gently on the floor near the door and throws his cap on the chest. He is a young pop-eyed mulatto of twenty-three or four, with a reckless, dissipated face, and close-cropped hair. He looks around the room as if the surroundings are new to him. Coming noiselessly over to the fire, he stands looking down at MUH MACK *with a grin of amusement and affection. He starts to speak, changes his mind and picks up a charred splinter from the fire and touches the hot end to her hand.*

MUH MACK—[*Bounding up in spite of her seventy years and rheumatism.*] Lawd in heaben! Whut's dat! [*She rubs her hand and stares sleepily and uncomprehendingly at* DOUGLASS *who is shaking with repressed laughter.*] Who's you? I say. [*Speaking to herself.*] Dat laugh sounds lak I knows him. [*He continues to gargle his fun. Suddenly she screams and pushes her chair away from him. Brushing her bonnet from her head, she pulls her spectacles down out of her scraggly, knotted white hair, and puts them on her nose. A delighted smile slowly breaks over her face.*] Lawd a muhcy, ef 'tain't

Doug come back ag'in! [*Her dark wrinkled face works with joy, and her one tooth stands out in a grimace of happiness. She rises to go to him, but her rheumatics send her back to her chair.*]

DOUG—Yeh, I's back foh a while and hopes you's well.

MUH MACK—[*Tremulously.*] Ain't you gwine howdy me?

DOUG—[*Taking a seat to the left of the fireplace and pulling up his trousers with a be-ringed hand.*] Aw le's squelch de kissing foh onct.

Nevertheless he rises, goes over and lightly touches her forehead with his lips. Then he stirs the fire and sits down. In the excitement MUH MACK *loses her snuff-brush on the floor.*

MUH MACK—[*Wiping the dripping snuff from her lips.*] Boy, I was afeared us wa'n't gwine never see hair ner hide o' you no mo'.

DOUG—[*Nonchalantly.*] Didn't think I'd lie out forever, did you? I hain't been gone but a smidgin over a couple o' yeah.

MUH MACK—And I wouldn't a-knowed you was back ef I hadn't gut to talking and carrying on dis mawning 'bout seeing you, and yo' pap up and lowed you'd come in yistiddy.

DOUG—Yeh, I rolled in on de six fo'ty-five.

MUH MACK—And you lak to run into him. [*Pointing to the door at the right.*] He des' dis minute back went out de do'. And he's down on you lak he useter was. [*Mournfully.*] Dey ain't no change in him and won't never be.

DOUG—'Y God! De boys says down de road dat he'd be at de meeting 'fo' seven, and I thought I'd slip in whiles he was gone. Dat was a close call.

MUH MACK—He was late lak all times, deefening my yurs wid his speech.

DOUG—[*Laughing.*] You'd ort to be used to dat by dis time. [*Looking around.*] Where is Mam?

MUH MACK—[*Not noticing his question.*] Where you been de past yeah. You hain't writ nary a word to none o' us.

DOUG—[*Sardonically.*] Whut call I had to write and me driv lak a dog from my own eaves. [*He lights a cigarette.*]

MUH MACK—[*Watching his every movement and feasting her eyes on him.*] He's de same old Doug, feet to haid.

DOUG—[*Throwing his match at the fire and speaking good humoredly.*] I worked a while in Wilson adder I left dis country. And den in Rocky Mount.

I had to light a rag outen Rocky Mount 'caze I gut in trouble over a woman dere—a mommer whut swung de jelly-roll too.

MUH MACK—[*With pride showing in her voice.*] I be bound you gut to git in wid de women. But you's 'herited my spo'ting blood.

DOUG—[*Looking at her narrowly.*] We been roundahs, hain't we?

MUH MACK—[*Happily.*] Hain't we dough! Hit's de onliest life foh dem whut has grit in dey craw.

DOUG—[*Gloomily.*] Yeh, but dey say it'll git you 'fo' you're done. Well, I had to leave Rocky Mount. And den I went over to Hamlet. [*Carelessly, as he crosses his legs.*] Been working and broozing around dere foh a yeah or mo'. [*He goes and peers in the kitchen, looking disgustedly at the surroundings.*] How you-all been making out wid dis farming, Muh Mack?

MUH MACK—Wusser'n nothing. Yo' pap ain't no mo' int'rested in it dan he is in you. De crap shows t. And he's gitting raght back into de school busi-ness. Talks how things is coming to his hand at last.

DOUG—[*With a glint in his eye.*] I reckon I dunno bout dat. Mebbe I put a liddle sand in his cylinders, nebbe I have.

MUH MACK—Whut's dat?

DOUG—Nothing a-tall. I's des speaking a mou'ful. How you come on yo'se'f?

MUH MACK—[*Beginning to groan.*] Po'ly, po'ly, I's sca'cely up and about. Mos' de time I des' sets heah by de fi'. My j'ints is gitting stiff and my eyes is trying to go out. [*Half whining.*] I cain't make out to trabbel no mo'. O Lawd!

Without giving her the expected expression of sympathy, DOUG *goes to the door at the left rear and looks in.*

DOUG—[*Coming to the fire.*] Huh, living in a stable lak dis is sho' a come down from de school in Fayetteville, ain't it? I lak never to found my way out heah. I ain't seed Mam about. Where is she?

MUH MACK—Up at Mr. McCranie's, cleaning leaves outen de yard and a-helping cook up foh Sunday. She knows you's round about.

DOUG—Must be gitting to de bottom o' de freezer when she has to work clean th'ough to Sadd'y night.

MUH MACK—We sho' is, and dat's scripture talking. We's a-gitting where we ain't gut 'nuff to eat —wid yo' pap's medicine bill so heavy.

DOUG—He ain't sick, is he? Huh, didn't think he could be kilt.

MUH MACK—He don't git no bedder. He coughed bad last night. Didn't sleep none.

DOUG—[*Unfeelingly.*] Must have de bugs.

MUH MACK—Mebbe you brung some money. [*Brightly.*] Wid dem clo'es you must gut money.

DOUG—In co'se I totes de green. But de old man won't git a damn red of it, not nary un. He ain't changed, ner I ain't nuther. We hates each other de same. And 'sides my 'spenses is turble high in Hamlet. [*He sits down and lights his cigarette, which has gone out, and blows rings of smoke to the ceiling.*] But I mought spare you and Mam a liddle. When's she coming back? I wants to see her 'fore I leaves.

MUH MACK—[*Alarmed and beginning to whine.*] You ain't gwine raght off, is you?

DOUG—Aw, can de growling. Co'se I ain't gwine raght off dis minute. But I's gut to be gone 'fo' de old man comes back. When he does come, he'll be looking lak de wraff o' God and up foh killing me sho' dis time, let alone driving off. In anudder hour er so he'll know who's put de fat in his far.

MUH MACK—Yeh, yeh—but he'll be back late. How long 'fo' you's gwine back 'way out yander to Hamlet?

DOUG—[*Calculating.*] I dunno ezzactly. You know I been s'pœnaed to co't.

MUH MACK—[*In sudden fear.*] Whut's dat de co't's done to you?

DOUG—I been summonsed as a witness to de lynching tri'l. You 'members de night dey lynched Angie Boling foh cutting of de sher'ff whilst dey was a-taking him to jail foh gutting dat Gus Turner wid a knife? I met some de men in de road dat night wid my cah and recognized 'em. So I's come to testify. But I's a-gitting big pay awright.

MUH MACK—Yo' pap's speech ag'in' dat lynching is whut started de trouble at Wilmington. [*Leaning forward with anxiety.*] Is you telling me de truf? Dey hain't no sher'ff been adder you out dere, has dey?

DOUG—Jesus Christ! Why you belching up dat fer?

MUH MACK—I was afeared dat mebbe Reenie had gut de law on you and brung you back.

DOUG—Everything's settled 'tween me and dat goose-necked gal. Ketch dis in yo' pipe. Dey ain't no officer adder me, and you mought dry up de jowing.

MUH MACK—[*Defensively.*] She says dat baby's yo'n.

DOUG—Huh?

MUH MACK—He's peart as a cricket and des' lak you wid a reg'lar wood's colt look.

DOUG—[*A bit of pride sifting through his voice.*] Dat he is mine. And he ain't de only one dat's mine in dis country. But I ain't gwine pay foh him dough. I seen a lawyer, and I kin prove she was crooked. Dat lets me out.

MUH MACK—Ain't you a show—a natchel bawn spo't and no 'sputing it. No wonder de gals cain't do widout you.

DOUG—[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] I gits dere when it comes to dem—long tall browns or high yallers. None of 'em cain't faze me. I takes 'em bofe coming and gwine. And I struts my mess.

MUH MACK—Dat you do.—And I's sho' glad everything's awright. [*Mournfully.*] Ef you and yo' pap could des' make up whiles you's heah and you could stay wid us! [*Moaning.*] But he won't dough. He won't.

DOUG—Dat he won't. And I don't want no making up. We's different. He's lak a white man and I ain't. Dey ain't no gitting 'long together.

MUH MACK—Yeh, he's lak his pap foh ambition. De old Colonel was a most monstrous man, but pow'ful wild wid his nigger women when dey had good looks hung to 'em—hee—hee—lak me!

DOUG—[*Pointedly.*] 'Y God, I reckon you'd ort to know how he was wid his women. Pap may be

lak him or not, but anyhow he so smart or crazy one, and I don't know which, dat nobody cain't live wid him.

MUH MACK—Dat's de truf. And he's allus brung trouble on us.

DOUG—And allus will till he gits his six foot o' dirt. Dat's de truf wrote down in God A'mighty's big book. [*Gazing around the room.*] He's come to de same old house he started out from as a boy and he's at de end of his rope.

MUH MACK—[*Noticing his disgust.*] Hit was de onliest place we could git adder de trouble at Fayetteville and yo' pap lay in jail. Mr. McCranie des' let us come back heah 'caze I once 'longed to his pap.

DOUG—Yeh, and he won't stay heah much longer. Look at de same old text dere on de wall. [*Derisively.*] "We are rising!" Lak hell he is. He's been on de down-hill drag ever since de fust trouble.

MUH MACK—We's sho' been walking de Lawd's tho'ny paf.

DOUG—When he tuck us out to Gawgy twenty yea'h ago to teach where dey was most ignerence, dere's where he crapped out. And we all come nigh gitting lynched wid our house burnt outen under us.

MUH MACK—[*Aghast at the remembrance.*] Lawd, hush! Don' bring up dem times.

DOUG—And den on into Alabam' wid de same old notion o' starting a school. It was wusser. [*Laughing roaringly.*] He made 'em rise dere awright, but lak Gawgy it was de white folks dat riz. [*A sharp note slipping into his words.*] He gut liddle Charlie shot through de haid and de rest of us beat black and blue—God damn him!—me laid cold by de burr o' de yur and his own skull split open to de goozle 'bout—hee-hee—yea, ain't he sump'n? [*He leans back and shakes with bitter laughter.*]

MUH MACK—[*Whining.*] Hush it! Hush it! Chile. I sees dem faces yit. Lawd God! And dat fi' and de shooting! [*She covers her face with her hands.*]

DOUG—[*Looking before him.*] And den he comes back to Nawth Ca'liny wid de same old stunt, does he? And he gits de people adder him ag'in at Wilmington. Now raght heah among his home folks he starts up. Dey wouldn't listen to him twenty yeah ago and dey won't now.

MUH MACK—Oh, hush scaring me!

DOUG—'Y God, why don' you and Mam whop off and leave him! You'd be bedder fixed.

MUH MACK—[*Blowing her nose in her skirt.*] She wouldn't. She'll stick to him to de last.

DOUG—Schools and school teacher! He hain't learnt adder all dese yeahs dat de fust thing to be taught is foh niggers to keep dey place.

MUH MACK—[*Looking at him uncertainly.*] You —you is right, chile.

DOUG—[*Clenching his hands above his head, his eyes shining with anger.*] Damn him! Damn white and black to hell, I says. [*He springs to his feet, all the evil of his race flares out into his smoldering countenance.*]

MUH MACK—Douglass, Boy, whut's de——

DOUG—[*Sitting down and laughing brutally at her.*] Let 'em all rot—rot in hell, in de deepest hell —de whole shooting-match—and me too. [*He covers his anger up with a broad grin and turns towards her and speaks laconically.*] Whut us niggers r'ally needs is a liddle extra change and a Fo'd cah foh de women and a box to play when we gits out wid 'em. Ain't it so, ain't it so?

MUH MACK—[*Still somewhat perplexed at his unusual vehemence, but pleased to see the real* DOUGLASS *come to the fore again.*] Dat it is. You tuck adder me th'ough and th'ough.

DOUG—[*Smiling sweetly but with a hidden hate.*] Let dem Norveners put pap in print foh whut he's done foh de niggers. Ef dey could see him now

dey'd not think he's such a sma't man. Let him read his books and git new ide's. Dey won't change de nigger in him not by a damn sight. He's raght down working a tenant and dat's where he belongs. Git me?

MUH MACK—Foh God's sake don' carry on so. Whut—whut mek you so ficey-lak? You been drinking?

DOUG—[*With sour laughter.*] Yeh, I been drinking. And I gut cause to cuss de whole works out. [*Looking at her fiercely.*] Listen heah. I thought onct I wouldn't tell you, but it's already gut out on me. Let dis slip in yo' yur, foh you'd heah it soon enough. You never has swung a eight-pound hammer, steel driving day adder day in de br'iling sun, has you? And you hain't never done it wid a ball and chain on you 'caze you is marked dang'ous, has you? And dat foh a whole yeah long? Well, I has.

MUH MACK—[*In astonishment.*] You been on de roads since you left!

DOUG—[*Recklessly.*] I has dat and wo' de convict clo'es des' 'caze in my drunkness I 'gun to preach some o' his doctrine 'bout dere being no difference 'twixt de cullud and de white. I knowed bedder. But I was drunk and hearn so many o' his speeches. De judge said he'd des' stop my mouf foh a month. And I gut a knife one day and stobbed de gyard

to de hollow. And dey gin me twelve months foh dat.

MUH MACK—[*Admiring her grandson's prowess.*] You allus was one whut fought at de drap o' de hat.

DOUG—[*Disgustedly.*] Yeh, a damn fool. [*Threateningly.*] But you'd bedder not say nothing to Mam. Mebbe she won't hear it till I'm gone ag'in. [*Bursting out with shining eyes.*] Hain't I gut cause to hate him and want to git him down?

MUH MACK—Well, I ain't gwine tell her. But gitting on de roads ain't much, Douglass Boy. De gals'll all lak you bedder ca'se you done a liddle time and been up in co't.

DOUG—[*Petulantly.*] Oh, I kin take care o' de women. No, it ain't much to lie in de jug, is it? You do it and you ain't never gwine have no mo' peace. De cops is allus watching you. You gits de look and dey knows you. Dey tried to 'rest me yistidy in Lillington, and I hadn't done nothing. And de old man was knowing to it too. But I's learnt what he'll never learn and it's dis—dat we belongs down wid de pick and de sludge hammer and de tee arn and de steam shovel and de heavy things—at de bottom doing de dirty work foh de white man, dat's it. And he ain't gwine stand foh us to be educated out'n it nuther. He's gwine keep us dere. It pays him to.

I sees it. And adder all dese yeahs pap keeps on trying to teach dat men is men. Some white man's gwine shoot his lights out one dese days, see ef dey don't. [*With a reckless forgetfulness.*] And so I says gimme a fast time, a liddle gin to drown down all my troubles in, and den [*He goes over to the door and gets his guitar.*] a liddle music to top it off wid. How 'bout it, Muh Mack?

MUH MACK—[*Straining her eyes through the shadows.*] Whut you gut dere? [*Jubilantly.*] Lawd, Lawd! Ef you hain't brung yo' box wid you! And I ain't heerd nothing but dem sporrers by de do' since you left two yeah back. Play her, boy, play her.

By this time he has sat down by the fire strumming.

DOUG—[*Tuning up while* MUH MACK *sits in a quiver of excitement.*] I gut a special piece I learnt in Rocky Mount. My 'oman said 'twas de onliest chune. Hit's called *De Handsome Roundah.*

MUH MACK—Le's have it, chile, le's have it. And den a few o' mine. [DOUG *begins playing, and as he plays the criminal of him passes from his face, and he becomes a child full of harmless enjoyment. He starts the music slowly. After a few bars he joins in with patting feet.* MUH MACK *sits tense with joy for a while and then commences swaying from side to side in time with the music.* DOUG *slides*

farther down into his chair, leaning his head back and growling out a syncopated humming sound as the melody quickens into an insistent throb. MUH MACK *pounds on the floor with her feet and stick. She quavers with delight.*] Sing it, Doug Boy, sing it.

He throws back his head and sings in a clear tenor voice:

De handsome roundah on his hoss,
And de playing of de band.
His yurnifo'm was silver and gol'!
My lan'! My lan'!

De ladies clapped dey diamont han's,
De roundah look so gran'.
And some dey cried a liddle bit—
Dey hearts honed foh dat man.

MUH MACK—[*Repeating.*] My lan'! My lan'! [*He looks at her, and they both smile as he puts "the gravy on it," their inner natures one with the running music.*] Ain't dat de old-time stuff?

DOUG—[*Winking at her and beating his knuckles against the sides of the guitar.*] Say on, sister. Blab it fer and wide. Step on her, step on her.

And whilst de music played he passed
A-leading of his men.
De ladies thought of wah and said
We won't see him ag'in.

De bugles played, de drums dey beat,
De hosses pawed de san'.
And den de crowd des' thundered loose,
My lan'! My lan'!

MUH MACK—[*Clapping her hands in rhythm.*] My lan'! My lan'!

DOUG—[*In a broad grin.*] Ain't dat de hundred proof! Ain't it dough? [MUH MACK *sits listening in a quiver of ecstasy.* DOUG *wraps himself over the guitar, his fingers popping up and down the neck of the instrument with marvelous dexterity. His bowed head begins to weave rhythmically about him, and he bursts into snatches of song.*]

Look down, look down dat lonesome road,
De hacks all dead in line.
Some give nickel, some give dime
To bury dis po' body o' mine.

MUH MACK—[*Staring at him.*] I declah! I declah! Listen at dat chile.

DOUG—Ne'h mind, ne'h mind. [*Modulating with amazing swiftness from key to key.*] And dere was po' Brady. Po' old Brady.

MUH MACK—Yeh, dey laid him down to die.

DOUG—[*Singing.*]

Oh, Brady, Brady, you know you done me wrong,
You come in when de game was a-going on,
And dey laid po' Brady down.

Wimmens in Gawgy dey heard de news
Walking about in deir little red shoes.
Dey glad, dey glad po' Brady dead.

When I close my eyes to ketch a liddle sleep,
Po' old Brady about my bed do creep.
One mo', des' one mo' roundah gone.

While he is singing and playing, the door at the right opens and GOLDIE *comes timidly in.* MUH MACK *stops and sits guiltily in her chair.* DOUG *tapers off his music and stops. For a moment* GOLDIE *stands astonished in the door, holding a bulky tow-sack in her hand. She drops the sack and hurries over to* DOUG.

GOLDIE—Muhcy me! I knowed 'twas you soon's I heered de guitar, and sech carryings-on!

DOUG—[*Rising confusedly as she comes up to him.*] How you, Mam?

She puts her hand shyly on his arm and then clings convulsively to him, her shoulders heaving with restrained sobs. He puts one arm around her and stands looking tenderly and somewhat foolishly down at her. It is evident that in his way he cares for her. She suddenly raises her head, dries her eyes with her apron, and fetches wood from the box.

GOLDIE—[*Punching the fire.*] Whyn't you let me know Douglass was come, Muh Mack?

MUH MACK—He des' come.

DOUG—[*Laying his box on the bed.*] Mam, you set in dis chur. You must be cold.

She sits down wearily, and he stands with his back to the fire. MUH MACK *takes up her snuff-brush and slyly begins to dip from her tin box.*

GOLDIE *is now about forty-five or fifty years old. Her figure is bent and disfigured by the years of toil and poverty and the violence of childbirth. Her movements are slow, ox-like, and in her eyes now and then comes a sort of vacant look as if some deadening disease has had its way within her brain, or as if trouble and worry have hardened her beyond the glow of enthusiasm or grief any more. Between her eyes a deep line has furrowed itself, a line often found on the foreheads of those who think a great deal or those who are beginning to forget how to think at all. And her mouth has long ago fastened itself into a drawn anguished questioning that has no answer to ease it.*

GOLDIE—[*With a sudden start of terror.*] You hain't seed yo' pap, has you?

MUH MACK—No. He des' left 'fo' Douglass come. [GOLDIE *breathes a sigh of relief.*] Said he'd be back 'bout ten o'clock. And co'se he thinks his speech de best dat ever was. Said de school was good as started.

GOLDIE—I's sho' glad to see you, Douglass Boy. I ain't heered a word foh mo'n a yeah. [*She chokes down a sob.*]

DOUG—[*Shamefacedly.*] Yeh, yeh, I kept 'specting to write. But I didn't feel in de notion. But it's awright now. I's back.

GOLDIE—[*Staring up at him.*] Thank de Lawd. And you's come in a good time. We's had trouble a heap dis last yeah. How long you gwine stay?

DOUG—I guess 'bout a week. And I's gwine sleep down at Joe Day's.

GOLDIE—[*Suddenly reaching out and clutching his hand to her face.*] Don't you and yo' pap have no trouble. Don't agg him on. He—he—ain't well and might rile easy. We—we kin see one 'nother off.

DOUG—Oh, I's gwine be partickler. Now don't worry no mo'. It's awright.

GOLDIE—[*Slowly getting up.*] You all set, while I fix you some supper. I's gut something good for Abe, and de rest of us. Lemme show you. [*She brings the bag, sits down in the chair and takes out a big meaty ham bone.* MUH MACK *eyes it hungrily. Naïvely.*] Ain't dat de finest dough? And I gut a hog haid, too, and collards and cracklings.

DOUG—[*Angrily.*] Dat's de way wid dem damn—wid dem white folks. Dey works you to death and

den sheves dey old skippery meat off on you foh pay.

GOLDIE—[*A worried look coming over her face.*] You hadn't ort to say dat, Douglass. Mr. Lonnie gi'n me it—all of it. And he paid me puore cash foh my work. Abe'll have a new bottle o' medicine Monday. [*She fingers the food childishly, and* DOUG *turns away his head with a smothered oath. Putting the food back into the bag, she stands up.*] Now I'll git you some supper.

DOUG—I cain't stay foh no supper. I promised to eat down de road wid Joe. Le's set and talk, 'caze we don't have much time, and you can cook adder I'm gone.

GOLDIE—[*She hesitates.*] Well—lemme put dese heah in de kitchen den. [*She goes out at the right.*]

DOUG—[*Turning sharply to* MUH MACK]. Whut's de matter wid Mam?

MUH MACK—Won't we des' a-having of a time when she broke in?

DOUG—Cut out de damn jowing. Whut makes Mam act so quair?

MUH MACK—[*Surprised.*] Do how? She acts awright.

DOUG—She don't. She acts sort o' lost lak—wropped

up in something. [*He scratches his head perplexed.*]

MUH MACK—Ef dey's anything wrong wid her it's 'count o' trouble, I reckin.

DOUG—De hell-fi'ed fool! He's drug her to death wid his wildishness.

MUH MACK—And ef it's trouble dat ails her, I reckins as how you's done yo' shur in bringing it.

He swallows his reply as GOLDIE *comes in. She lights the lamp, then sits down and begins staring in the fire.*

DOUG—[*After turning from one side to the other.*] Mammy, whut's de matter wid you?

GOLDIE—[*Brushing her hand across his face and looking up as she wipes the tears from her eyes.*] Lawd bless you, chile, dey ain't—dey ain't nothing. I's des' happy to be wid you. [*She catches his hand and holds it a moment, then drops it and begins to look in the fire.* DOUG *watches her intently and then turns away as if somewhat awed by her manner.*] Cain't you play something else on de box? [*Quickly.*] But I don't want none o' dem ungodly pieces lak whut you was playing when I come in.

DOUG—[*Eagerly.*] Yeh, lemme play a liddle something foh you. [*He gets his guitar and resumes his place before the fire and begins strumming.*] Yeh, and fohgit dat Pap is off some'rs fixing to bring more trouble on you.

GOLDIE—[*Lcoking up, frightened.*] Whut's dat! You—hadn't ort—— [*She looks appealingly at him.*]

DOUG—[*Brusquely and beginning to pluck the strings.*] Aw, dat's awright. I didn't say nothing.

A screech owl calls from the hollow back of the house.

MUH MACK—Ugh! Listen dere, listen dere at dat scritch owl.

DOUG—[*Starting.*] Aw de devil! You's enough to skeer de daid.

MUH MACK—Hit's a sign o' trouble.

GOLDIE—Gimme de music. I wants my old piece.

DOUG—[*Stirring uneasily.*] Oh, le's don't play dat piece. It's too—too mo'nful.

GOLDIE—Dat's why I laks it.

DOUG—Lemme give you a reg'lar piece. One you useter lak. [*Despite her movement of protest, he hurries into playing and singing.*]

She hug me and she kiss me,
She helt my hand and cried.
She said I was de sweetest thing
Dat ever lived or died.

She hug me and she kiss me—
Oh, heaben de tech o' her hand!
She said I was de puttiest thing
In de shape o' mortal man.

I told her dat I love her,
Dat my love was bedcord strong,
And I axed her——

GOLDIE—[*Crying out in agitation.*] I cain't listen to dat. It's blaspheaming de Lawd! [DOUG *lets the music die away into low strummings, finishing the stanza in a subdued voice:*]

——when she'd have me,
And she des says "Go 'long."

GOLDIE—'Tain't right. Dat's a fast song. And I ain't feeling lak no world'y reels. Gimme my old piece.

MUH MACK—[*In a hypocritically sad voice.*] Give us dat piece, chile. We's had trouble, and mo' trouble's coming.

DOUG—[*Ironically.*] In co'se you's had trouble and balanced on de brink o' hell.

GOLDIE—Yeh, yeh, play it. [*Fervidly.*] In dat turble Judgment Day [DOUG *shivers.*] de Lawd's gwine pay 'em back foh whut Abe's had to suffer in dis world. De people'll see, de people'll see. [*She clasps and unclasps her hands nervously.*]

DOUG—[*Mournfully.*] Allus thinking o' him.

GOLDIE—[*With flashing eyes.*] Play it!

DOUG *glances at her fearfully and begins playing in a slow lonely minor which necessitates sliding his fingers on the strings in such a way as to cause them to give out a sound like a deep far-off groan.*

MUH MACK—[*Shivering and drawing her fascinator around her.*] Ugh!

Again DOUG *starts nervously.* GOLDIE *rubs her hands together, with a strange look set on her face.*

GOLDIE—Sing it! Sing it, I say.

DOUG—I cain't sing it—I cain't sing dat. [*Nevertheless, his fingers go on playing. And caught in the spell of the song, he begins to sing.*]

> Judgment's a-coming, Judgment's a-coming!
> God's gwine speak from outen de sky,
> All sinners gwine be burnt wid fi',
> Judgment's a-coming, Judgment's a-coming!
> Judgment Day.

MUH MACK—[*Whispering.*] Lawd Jesus! Have muhcy on me!

DOUG *swallows and the song goes on.*

DOUG—

Judgment's a-coming, Judgment's a-coming!
De moon hit's gwine be turnt to blood,
And de sun be drownded in a 'whelming flood.
Judgment's a-coming, Judgment's a-coming!
Judgment Day.

MUH MACK—[*In an ecstasy of terror.*] God in heaben! Jedgement's a-coming! O Lawd, snatch dis po' bran' from de burning!

DOUG *falters.* GOLDIE *sits staring in the fire, rapt away before the terrors of that great day when the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll.*

DOUG—

Judgment's a-coming, Judgment's a-coming!
De dark's gwine kiver from sho' to sho',
And de angel wid de trumpet say time's no mo'.
Judgment's a-coming, Judgment's a-coming!
Judgment Day.

His voice dies in his throat, and he stands with bowed head, as he softly picks over the words, "Judgment's a-coming." MUH MACK *is half sobbing out a medley of prayers and exclamations of fear.* GOLDIE'S *lips are silently repeating the words of the song, her face lighted up with a demoniac joy. She sees her enemies in their dreadful confusion and her loved ones with their deserved rewards. For a moment the picture of the world's*

destruction and the final cataclysmic change overpowers them. They remain silent before the Worker of woes. The owl calls again. MUH MACK *crouches down in her chair.* DOUG *in a fit of nervousness turns himself about. Then he throws the guitar on the bed, shakes himself, buttons up his coat, and throws some wood on the fire. He lights a cigarette, and with the puffs his courage returns. He begins to smile and look boldly around the room.*

GOLDIE—[*Speaking as one in a trance.*] In dat great day, in dat great day, it'll all come right.

DOUG—[*Peering intently at his mother.*] Ain't we a mess o' people to be seeing the devil streaking th'ough the shadows! [*He gets his cap from the chest and stands looking from one to the other. He goes up to* GOLDIE.] Well, I 'spects I bedder mosey on down to Joe's. 'Bout roosting time. [*He makes a move towards the door.*]

MUH MACK—Don't go, Douglass Boy. I's afeared. You heerd de owl make his holler.

GOLDIE—[*Turning towards him in fear and speaking abstractedly.*] Don't be gwine off so early. [*She pulls at his hand.*] I hain't mo'n seed you.

DOUG—Well, le's git out o' dese trances and 'muning wid de speerits ef I's gwine stay heah.

GOLDIE—[*Twisting her hands.*] Le's set and talk, and don't go 'way and leave us.

He crams his cap into his pocket and stands to the fire. The tears begin to stream from GOLDIE'S *eyes.*

DOUG—[*Astonished and impatient.*] Whut'n de name o' God's de matter, Mam?

GOLDIE—Ef you could only stay raght on wid us and didn't have to leave!

DOUG—[*Pondering a moment and then looking up and speaking nonchalantly.*] Well, mebbe—well—[*With decision.*] I 'bout decided to git a steady job at de brickmill over de river and stay 'round where I kin sorter look adder you.

GOLDIE—[*Uncomprehendingly.*] Is you?

MUH MACK—[*Bursting out.*] And den we could have music at spells.

GOLDIE—[*A great joy flooding her face.*] Bless de Lawd! At de last some o' my trouble is gwine leave me. [*She watches him hungrily. But suddenly the harried vacant look settles over her face.*] But I dunno—I dunno.

DOUG—Whut's dat! Whut's de trouble now?

GOLDIE—Mr. Lonnie done says to-day that he's gut de crap away from Abe. He's levied on all of it foh debts and fo'bids anybody teching it. He's gwine har hands and pick it. [*Wringing her hands.*]

I cain't tell Abe 'bout it, I cain't. He's already gut more'n he kin stand.

DOUG—'Y God! you'd ort to leave him, I tell you. Dere's where his education lands him. Ef you'll let me, I'll take care o' you. But you gut to leave him.

GOLDIE—[*With a frightened movement.*] I cain't —I——

The tears flood afresh from her eyes. There is a noise of some one's coming up on the porch.

MUH MACK—[*Crying out in fear.*] Dat's him, Douglass. I knows his step. Dat's yo' pap done come back.

GOLDIE *stands wringing her hands and crying silently as* DOUG *gets his handbag and guitar and hurries into the kitchen.* GOLDIE *rises and brings wood from the box. The door at the left opens and* ABE *enters.*

GOLDIE—[*Leaning forward and rousing the fire.*] Why you back so quick, Abe? 'Tain't even nine yit. Did—did everything turn out? [MUH MACK *suddenly screams.* GOLDIE *looks up and cries out.*] Oh!

ABE *comes towards the fire. His face is bruised, his clothes torn, and he sways as he walks.*

MUH MACK—[*Rising from her chair.*] Dey's been adder him! Dey's been adder him ag'in!

ABE—[*Snarling at her.*] Shet up yo' damn yowling, will you? and don't be rousing de neighborhood. I'm not dying yet.

GOLDIE *stands a moment terror-stricken and then runs up to him.*

GOLDIE—You's hurt, hurt bad, Abe.

ABE—[*Pushing her back.*] I'm not hurt much. No time to doctor me now. [*He stands before the fire.* MUH MACK *collapses in her chair. He is no longer the reformer and educator, but a criminal, beaten and hunted. His learning drops away from him like a worn-out garment. He is panting for breath.*] I come to tell you to git away!—to—to leave, leave!

GOLDIE—[*Sobbing and burying her face in her hands.*] Whut's happened! Whut's happened!

MUH MACK—[*Swaying in her chair, and crying to herself.*] Lawd-a-muhcy on us! Lawd-a-muhcy!

For a moment he stands before the women silent with closed eyes.

ABE—[*Looking at the motto on the wall and repeating the words dully.*] We are rising! [*Echoing.*] We are rising!—He didn't know what he said, he didn't. [*He staggers and grips the mantel and stands listening as if to far-away sounds. He turns desperately to the cowering women.*] Git your

clothes and leave. You got to go. I tell you everything's finished at de end.

GOLDIE—[*Wailing.*] What happened at de schoolhouse? Did—did anybody——

ABE—[*Pushing his bruised hand across his forehead.*] I cain't, cain't quite think—yeh, they was a crowd of white men at de door with masks over their faces. Said wa'n't going to be no meeting. Dey beat me, run me off, and give me till to-morrow to git out'n de country. You got to git away, foh it's worse'n dat. Oh, it is! [*Calmly and without bitterness.*] Who you reckon set 'em on me? Who you think it was told 'em about de trouble I been in before? Yeh, and he made it out terribler'n it was. Douglass told 'em. He done it. My own flesh and blood. No! no! he was but ain't no more! [*Gloomily.*] But I don't blame him—dey ain't no blaming nobody no longer.

GOLDIE—[*Fiercely.*] He didn't—he wouldn't turn ag'in' his own pa.

ABE—[*Sternly.*] Hush! He did though. But it don't matter to-night. And you got to leave. [*Half screaming and tearing at the mantel.*] Now! now, I tell you!

GOLDIE—[*Between her sobs.*] Did you—who hurt you?

ABE—I tell you I've done murder, and they're coming for me.

MUH MACK *sits doubled up with fear, her head between her arms. With a sharp gasp* GOLDIE *ceases weeping and sits strangely silent.*

MUH MACK—Muhder! Oh, lawd-a-muhcy.

She mumbles and sobs into her rag.

ABE—Dey drove me away from the meeting. I come back by the road mad. [*He gasps.*] Every white man's hand ag'in' me to the last. And Mr. Lonnie come out to de road when I passed his house and begun to abuse me about de crop. He struck at me, and I went blind all of a sudden and hit him with my fist. Den we fou't. [*His voice growing shrill.*] And I hit him and hit him. I beat his head in. I killed him dead, dead! I beat on and on till all de madness went out of me and de dark was everywhere. [*He stops, aghast at the remembrance.*] I left him dere in de night dead on de ground. Dey done found 'im. I heah 'em crying up dere in de night. Dey's coming to git me. [*He holds out his bruised hands.*] His blood's still shining on my hands. [*He turns his head away in fear.*]

MUH MACK—[*In a high whine of horror.*] My God A'mighty! You kilt yo' own flesh.

ABE—[*Turning wrathfully upon her.*] Yeh, yeh,

you bitch, you went a-coupling wid a white man! [*He drops his hands helplessly. A sort of terror comes upon him.*] Oh, Lawd God! I'm another Cain. I tell you, I—I scrushed his head in and beat on till I put out de stars wid blood. Mercy! Mercy! [*With his hands still held before him, he stands with bowed head. After a moment he looks up and speaks calmly, almost resignedly, his dignity coming back to him.*] This is the way it was meant to be, and I'm glad it's ended. [*He stands with his fists to his temples, and then flings out his arms in a wide gesture.*] Oh, but damn 'em! Don't they know I wanted to do all for the best. [*Shaking his fist at the shadows.*] I tell you, I tell you I wanted—I've tried to make it come right. [*Lowering his head.*] And now it's come to this.

DOUG *comes in from the kitchen and stands away before him, his face filled with shame and fear.* ABE *looks at him without interest.*

DOUG—Befo' God, Pap, I—I didn't mean no sech happenings. I never thought——

ABE—[*Eyeing him coldly.*] Who you? [*More loudly.*] A leader, a king among men! [*To the women.*] Here's Douglass and you can go on wid him.

DOUG *turns back into the kitchen and instantly runs out. His eyes are staring with fear.*

DOUG—[*In a throaty whisper.*] Come on, Mam! [*Twisting his cap in terror.*] Dey's coming! I heered 'em up de lane. Dey's coming. Run, Pap! God have muhcy!

MUH MACK *hobbles to him and tries to pull him through the door at the right. He looks back towards his mother.*

MUH MACK—Come on! Come on!

DOUG—Mam, Mam, don't stay heah!

ABE—[*Raising* GOLDIE *from her chair.*] Go on wid him. You ain't to blame foh nothing.

He pushes her towards DOUG. *But she turns and throws her arms around him, clinging silently to his breast.*

MUH MACK—[*Pulling* DOUG.] I heahs 'em. Dat's dem coming!

With an anxious look at GOLDIE, DOUG *hurries with* MUH MACK *through the door and into the fields.* ABE *places* GOLDIE *back in her chair and stands looking at her. He catches her by the shoulders and shakes her.*

ABE—Tell me, what is it, Goldie? What ails you, gal? [*She sits looking dumbly at him. He draws away from her. Suddenly several shots are fired in the field and* MUH MACK'S *high scream rends the*

air. ABE *raises his head savagely.*] Hanh, yeh, you git paid back dis night. Dey shoot you down in yo' tracks. [*He stands listening. Presently there is a sound of stamping feet outside, and voices slip in like the whispering of leaves. A stone is thrown against the house, then another and another. One crashes through the window and strikes the lamp. The room is left in a semi-darkness.* ABE *with a sob of overwhelming terror falls upon his knees. Twisting his great hands together, he casts up his eyes and cries out in a loud voice.*] God, God, where is you now! Where is you, God! [*He begins half sobbing and chanting.*] You has helped befo', help me now. Is you up dere? Heah my voice! [*Fear takes possession of him.*] Blast me, Lawd, in yo' thunder and lightning, burn me in yo' fiery furnace if it is yo' will! Ketch me away in de whirlwind, foh I'm a sinner. Yo' will, yo' will, not mine. Let brimstone and fire burn me to ashes and scatter me on the earth. [*Gasping.*] I've tried, I've tried to walk de path, but I am po' and sinful. Give me peace, rest —rest if it is thy will. Save me, Jesus, save me! [*He falls sobbing to the floor.*]

VOICE—[*Outside.*] Come out of there, you dirty nigger! [*A shudder runs through him, and his sobs grow less violent.*] Come out! Come out!

Another stone crashes through the room. As if

ashamed of his weakness, ABE *rises from the floor. He speaks firmly to the shadows.*

ABE—In the end it was so intended. [*He bursts out in a loud voice.*] Yet they're asleep, asleep, and I can't wake 'em!

VOICES—He's in there. I hear him talking. He's done talking now, goddam him! We'll show him the law all right. He's got a gun! Shoot him like a dog.

ABE—[*Wiping his brow and again speaking in the rôle of the educator trying to convince his everlastingly silent hearers.*] But they'll wake, they'll wake— A crack of thunder and deep divided from deep— A light! a light, and it will be! [GOLDIE *still sits hunched over in her chair.* ABE *goes to the door at the left.*] I go speak to 'em, I go tell 'em. We got to be free, freedom of the soul and of the mind. Ignorance means sin and sin means destruction. [*Shouting.*] Freedom! freedom! [*He opens the door.*]

VOICE—Hell! Look out! There he is!

ABE—And guns and killings is in vain. [*He steps out on the porch.*] What we need is to—to— [*His words are cut short by a roar from several guns. He staggers and falls with his head in the doorway.*] and we must have—have——

At the sound of the guns, GOLDIE *springs to her feet. For an instant everything is still. Then several shots are fired in his body.*

VOICE—Quit the shooting. He's dead as a damned door! Now everybody get away from here. No talking, no talking. Keep quiet—quiet.

There is a sound of shuffling footsteps and men leaping the fence. VOICES *come back into the room.*

VOICE—Yeh, mum's it.

He won't raise no more disturbances! [*The voices grow more faint.*]

What a bloody murder he done!

He's still now, still, by God!

It's the only way to have peace——

Peace, by God!

GOLDIE *moves towards the door where* ABE *lies. Halfway across the room she stops and screams and then drops down beside his body. The wind blows through the house setting the sparks flying.*

LIST OF PAUL GREEN'S PLAYS

(Unless otherwise stated, all plays are in one act. Dates indicate year of composition.)

The Last of the Lowries (1920. *In Carolina Folk Plays, I,* Henry Holt, 1922); *Old Wash Lucas*—originally *The Miser*—(1920. In *The Lord's Will,* etc., Henry Holt, 1925); *The Long Night* (1920. Not published); *The Old Man of Edenton* (1920. In *The Lord's Will,* etc., Henry Holt, 1925); *White Dresses* (1920. In Lewis' *Contemporary One-Act Plays,* Scribner, 1922, and in *Lonesome Road,* McBride, 1926); *Wrack P'int* (1921. Not published); *The Lord's Will* (1921. In *The Lord's Will,* etc., Henry Holt, 1925); *Blackbeard* (with Elizabeth Lay Green, 1921. In *The Lord's Will,* etc., Henry Holt, 1925); *Granny Boling* (1921. In *Drama* Magazine, 1921); *Sam Tucker* (1921. In *Poet Lore,* 1922); *The Cup of Fury* (1923. Not published); *Day by Day* (1923. Not published); *The No 'Count Boy* (1923. In *Theatre Arts Monthly,* 1924, and *The Lord's Will,* etc., Henry Holt, 1925); *The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock* (1923. In *One-Act Plays for Stage and Study, II,* Samuel French, 1925); *The Hot Iron* (1923. In *Poet Lore,* 1924, and in *Lonesome Road,* McBride, 1926); *The End of the Row* (1923. In *Poet Lore,* 1924, and in *Lonesome Road,* McBride, 1926); *The Prayer Meeting* (1923. Rewritten version of *Granny Boling.* In *Poet Lore,* 1924, and in *Lonesome Road,* McBride, 1926); *Your Fiery Furnace* (1923. Rewritten version of *Sam Tucker.* In *Lonesome Road,* McBride, 1926); *In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin* (1924. Samuel French, 1925); *In Abraham's Bosom* (1924. In *Lonesome Road,* McBride, 1926); *Fixin's* (with Erma Greene, 1924. In *Carolina Folk Plays, II,* Henry Holt, 1924); *Quare Medicine* (1925. Not published); *The Dry Tree* (1925. Not published); *The Field God* (1925. In 3 acts. Not published); *In Abraham's Bosom* (1925. 6 scenes. Not published).

The following plays were destroyed by the author:

A Surrender to the Enemy (1917); *Souvenir* (1919); *The God on the Hill* (1919).